NEW PHILOSOPHIES OF FILM

SECOND EDITION

AN INTRODUCTION TO CINEMA AS A WAY OF THINKING

ROBERT SINNERBRINK

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To Louise, my favourite movie companion, and to Eva and Miriam, film-philosophers of the future!

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New Preface: Philosophical Film Theory Today

At first blush, film and philosophy appear to be uneasy bedfellows. Going to the movies and having a philosophical conversation seem to share little in common. Philosophers feature very rarely in films, although it is usually intriguing when they do. In a memorable scene from Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1962), for example, the beautiful Nana [Anna Karina] engages a 'real life' philosopher [Brice Parain] in conversation at a café. In good existentialist fashion, they talk of the necessity to talk, the difficulty of saying what one means, the way speech and action conflict, whether one can speak and live at once. At one point during the philosopher's monologue, Nana turns to the camera, addressing us with her ambiguous, mesmerising gaze. Her gesture is simple but poses many questions: what is this experience we call 'cinema'? How are film and philosophy related? Can their relationship be a true meeting of minds (and bodies)? Can films 'do philosophy'?

This book is dedicated to these questions, exploring, in particular, the fascinating and complex relationship between film and philosophy. From strangers in the night they have become more than good friends. After a longstanding suspicion or indifference (at least on the part of philosophy), the recent flourishing of philosophical writing on film has been a very welcome surprise. The idea that film can contribute to philosophy has gained traction and opened up new ways of thinking about both film and philosophy. What are these 'new philosophies of film?' Why have philosophy and film theory come together in such fruitful (and sometimes fractious) ways? *New Philosophies of Film* examines the new wave of philosophical film theory that has challenged the older paradigm (so-called 'Grand Theory'), drawn on the best of the history of film theory, and combined these insights with novel philosophical approaches to cinema. These philosophical approaches are distinguished by their retrieval and renewal of the core problems of classical film theory, including the ontology of film, the question of film as art, how we understand and interpret film, the role of emotional engagement and moral evaluation and the question of film and ethics. In the chapters that follow I focus on three major currents: the analytic-cognitivist turn in film theory; an alternative stream (inspired by Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze) that explores how film and philosophy

respond to shared problems (film-philosophy); and the idea of 'film as philosophy' (that films not only illustrate but can 'do' philosophy in their own way). Because it is better to demonstrate than to describe a way of thinking, the final three chapters of this book offer diverse examples of 'film-philosophy' in action, focusing on individual works – documentary, cinematic and televisual – in order to demonstrate how these works can be regarded as cases of 'cinematic thinking' that contribute to philosophical and ethical understanding. In doing so, I wish to show how the relationship between film and philosophy has the possibility of becoming a mutually transformative encounter: an aesthetic experiment in new ways of thinking.

In the ten years since the first edition of this book, there have been remarkable and dramatic changes in the field of film theory and philosophy of film (or what we might conveniently term 'philosophical film theory'). The first is the rise and impact of new digital media, the digital revolution in cinema that has profoundly transformed how films are shot, produced, distributed and viewed. This shift, from analogue to digital media, has major implications for some of the 'classical' questions of film theory, in particular concerning the ontology of the moving image, emotional engagement, moral evaluation and the aesthetic possibilities of the transformed medium. I address these questions in the chapters that follow, expanding my discussion where required in order to take into account the ways in which the new digital forms of image-making have shifted or transformed our more familiar forms of cinematic engagement. The second is a more far-reaching and substantial synthesis of seemingly disparate theoretical approaches, particularly phenomenological and cognitivist approaches, but also drawing on neuroscientific and bioculturalist perspectives, which have been brought to bear on areas that hitherto did not receive much attention from these perspectives, notably the art film and television. The third is the resurgence of ethico-political approaches to cinema, drawing on feminist and gender theory, critical race theory, and post-colonialist/critical theory perspectives. All of these recent developments are important in their own right but they have also influenced, shaped and redirected various strands of film theory and film-philosophy in ways that deserve greater critical attention. I have therefore endeavoured to acknowledge and incorporate discussion concerning these more recent developments in relevant chapters of the book, which in the process has subtly broadened and transformed my study in enriching and rewarding ways.

Finally, I have updated and diversified the selection of three case studies in the concluding three chapters of the book. I focus on two philosophical documentaries, *Derrida* (Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman 2002) and

D'ailleur Derrida (Safaa Fathy 1999), and on Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011), but also extend my discussion to television, namely, the award-winning series *Black Mirror* (2011–2019). I treat these audiovisual works as ways of not only exploring the relationship between film and philosophy, or more particularly, between film and ethics, but as cases of 'cinematic thinking' in action. My rationale for doing this was to broaden the horizon of cinematic works that could be approached from philosophical perspectives and that could be regarded as contributing to philosophical understanding but as doing so in specifically cinematic (and televisual) ways. Most philosophical work on cinema has focused on (popular) narrative film, with some attention given to art cinema, but it has only recently begun to explore documentary film. Television is another domain that has only recently attracted serious philosophical, aesthetic and theoretical attention, and is where we can find some of the most original, dynamic and creative works today. Accordingly, I attempt to showcase some of this philosophically rich and ethically engaging work in my concluding chapters on challenging, creative and thought-provoking documentary, cinematic and televisual works. They aim to show what it might mean to approach and experience cinematic works as 'ways of thinking'.

A book has many parents who contribute to the conception and maturing of ideas that eventually appear in written form. This is especially true for revisiting and revising my book for its second edition, which only lengthens and deepens the list of people to whom I owe many debts, intellectual and otherwise. Among the many friends and colleagues who have encouraged me over the years, I owe a special debt of thanks to the following people, whether for inspiring conversation, constructive suggestions or invaluable support: Mathew Abbott, Louise D'Arcens, Lucy Bolton, Michelle Boulous-Walker, William Brown, Romana Byrne, Havi Carel, Alan Cholodenko, Felicity Colman, Amy Coplan, Damian Cox, David Davies, Stefan Deines, Ludo de Roo, Jean-Philippe Deranty, Lisabeth During, Joanne Faulkner, Chris Falzon, the *Film-Philosophy* editorial crew, Daniel Frampton, Berys Gaut, Michael Goddard, Greg Hainge, Julian Hanich, Ilona Honigsto, Laleen Jayamanne, Fiona Jenkins, Noel King, Andrew Klevan, Marguerite LaCaze, Tarja Laine, Paisley Livingston, Adrian Martin, Brigid Martin, David Martin-Jones, Kathryn Millard, Matilda Mroz, John Mullarkey, Tom Murray, Ted Nannicelli, Karen Pearlman, Mairead Phillips, Patricia Pisters, Murray Pomerance, Daniel Ross, Martin Rossouw, William Rothman, Libby Saxton, Martin Seel, Dan Shaw, Murray Smith, Richard Smith, David Sorfa, Jane Stadler, Lisa Trahair, Greg Tuck, Julia Vassilieva, Thomas Wartenberg, Mario Wenning, Saige Walton, Catherine Wheatley and Magdalena Zolkos.

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Chapter 12, 'Television as Philosophy: Reflections on *Black Mirror*', is an extended version of a book chapter I contributed to a volume on *Black Mirror* edited by the late Dan Shaw (then taken over and completed by Kendall Marshall and James Rocha). Due to a range of other commitments, I ran late submitting this chapter to Dan late in 2019, who did an outstanding

job as editor and promptly returned my overly long text just before Christmas with excellent suggestions for cutting and streamlining the argument. Dan then left for a holiday in Spain in early 2020 but returned home with pneumonia. He died, suddenly and tragically on March 3, 2020. His passing was a great blow to the film and philosophy community not only in the United States but across the globe. He was a warm and affable person, with great generosity of spirit, wry sense of humour and plucky resilience. He was also an important pioneer and standout contributor to our field (having edited the seminal journal *Film and Philosophy* up to his death), and an inspiring teacher and valued colleague. I dedicate this book to his memory.

Introduction: Why Did Philosophy Go to the Movies?

Chapter Outline

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Over the past one hundred years or so, philosophy has been rather averse to the cinema. Among the great modern thinkers, film barely rates a mention. In 1906, French vitalist Henri Bergson described the 'cinematographic mechanism' of consciousness, only to then criticise the 'cinematographic illusion' by which we compose (apparent) movement from an animated series of static images (Bergson 2005 [1907]: 251–252). Despite an intriguing philosophical dialogue touching on Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), German thinker Martin Heidegger denounced film and photography as part of the reduction of art to an aesthetic resource that reflects the pernicious essence of modern technology (Heidegger 1982: 15–17). French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty is the exception proving the rule, having composed a short essay on film and (gestalt) psychology, and making significant remarks on cinematic examples in his phenomenological work (1964: 48–59; 2002). Despite Merleau-Ponty's evident interest in the movies, French phenomenology, on the whole, tended to ignore it. Indeed, it is

only in recent years that phenomenology, including representatives from both classical (Husserl) and French phenomenological traditions (Merleau-Ponty), has been brought to bear on the theorisation of film (see Casebier 1991; Sobchack 1992). Even Walter Benjamin's enthusiasm for the culturally and politically emancipatory dimensions of film was tempered by concern over its role in the 'aestheticisation of the political' (2006: 269).

Within modern culture, moreover, film has typically been presented as 'the other' of serious philosophy. After delivering his arduous Cambridge lectures, Ludwig Wittgenstein, so the story goes, would rush to find solace in the front row of the local movie theatre. Stress release from the rigours of conceptual analysis is how Wittgenstein's passion for Hollywood musicals, Westerns and detective stories is often portrayed (see Gilmore 2005). Until recent decades, particularly within the Anglo-American (analytic) tradition, this has also been true of philosophy's relationship with film: an amusing distraction, aesthetic example or theoretical resource, perhaps, but not something having intrinsic philosophical worth. That a philosopher like Stanley Cavell felt obliged to explain his decision to take movies – like romantic comedies and melodramas – seriously *as* philosophy is telling in this regard. As Cavell remarks, however, the great mystery is to explain why philosophy has ignored film, and why their relationship has been so ambivalent. There is, on the one hand, philosophy's persistent avoidance of film, as though philosophy were aware of film's power to challenge it (Cavell 2008: xiv). On the other, there is an affinity between film and philosophy (Cavell 1999: 25), with film presenting a 'moving image of scepticism' that philosophy both stages and attempts to dispel (Cavell 1981: 188–189). Such an encounter, however ambivalent, should not mean that philosophy can now rejuvenate itself by appropriating film. As this book will argue, the point is to show how the film-philosophy encounter can open up new paths for thinking, exploring the idea that cinema itself might be regarded as a way of thinking (through moving images).

New Philosophies of Film is intended as both an introduction to the dynamic new wave of philosophising on film and as an independent contribution to this developing model of interdisciplinary engagement. It welcomes both passionate film enthusiast and dedicated philosophical reader (who may well be one and the same), and aims to explore some of the most significant developments in philosophical film theory over the past two-and-a-half decades, showing how the emerging field of film and philosophy is one of the most exciting in aesthetics today. This hybrid field, however, has not emerged in a vacuum. The rise of the new philosophies of film, which have drawn on analytic philosophy, aesthetics and cognitivist psychology, but also on phenomenology and various currents of

Continental philosophy, has coincided with the decline of 1970s and 1980s screen theory. This interdisciplinary approach is also distinguished by its efforts to recast many of the problems of classical film theory – concerning the ontology of film, the question of film as art, questions of narrative, character, authorship and genre, the role of emotional engagement and the question of ethics and film – within a philosophically renewed and theoretically transformed paradigm (supplanting the older paradigm of psychoanalytic-semiotic film theory). Such a shift is as much motivated by the questions and challenges raised by the transition to digital media, which has renewed speculation and reflection on classic aesthetic or philosophical questions concerning the ontology of moving images, realism and representation, distinctions between cinema and other visual arts, and the relationship between fictional and non-fictional forms of audiovisual narration. Whatever one's view on this shift, which some regard as a productive transformation, and others as a 'hostile takeover', this new wave of philosophical film theory, which I will call the *analytic-cognitivist* paradigm, has become increasingly influential over the past two decades (see Elsaesser 2019: 19–31; Nannicelli and Taberham 2014; Rodowick 2007a, 2007b).[1]

At the same time, however, this paradigm is being challenged by alternative philosophical approaches, which have also moved away from the earlier paradigm of screen/film theory. In later chapters, I explore this alternative way of approaching the film-philosophy relationship, namely the idea of 'film as philosophy' (see Mulhall 2002, 2008; Rodowick 2014, 2015; Sinnerbrink 2013a, 2019a; Wartenberg 2007). In doing so, I argue for greater interactive engagement between the more traditional *philosophy of film*, and the minor, interdisciplinary current of what I call *film-philosophy*, an alternative approach that combines aesthetic receptivity to film with philosophically informed reflection. My aim is to elucidate the productive possibilities for rethinking the film-philosophy relationship that are opened up by the encounter between new philosophies of film and film-philosophy, as contrasting yet complementary ways of exploring the philosophical dimensions of moving images.[2]

A User's Guide to Film and Philosophy

Interest in the film-philosophy relationship has burgeoned in the last three decades, with a striking surge of interest in philosophical responses to questions of classical film theory, and enthusiastic exploration of the idea of

'film as philosophy'.[3] While film theory has retreated from psychoanalytical and semiotic theorising, philosophers have discovered the manifold pleasures of film. We can now speak of the 'philosophy of film' as an independent field with its own theoretical debates, competing schools and research programmes.[4] Although Stanley Cavell published works on the topic during the 1970s (*The World Viewed* was first published in 1971), philosophy of film only emerged as a specialty area from the late 1980s through to the late 1990s.[5] This was also the period in which the prevailing paradigm of film theory – what Bordwell and Carroll dubbed 'Grand Theory' – began to enter a theoretical and disciplinary crisis. Although establishing a clear causal connection is difficult, one can venture that the philosophical critique of the troubled paradigm of psychoanalytic-semiotic film theory was one important factor in its decline. This was accompanied by simultaneous critiques from historicist film studies, the emerging cognitivist film theory approach, from 'Continental' philosophical approaches, as well as internal critiques of film theory (including from the perspective of 'postmodernist' forms of cultural studies) (see Rodowick 2007a, 2007b; Elsaesser 2019: 19–31).

As D. N. Rodowick confirms, during the 1980s film studies was challenged on three fronts, suffering a 'triple displacement' by historical studies, cognitivist psychology and analytic philosophy (2007a: 94–95). According to Rodowick, much of what is now dismissed as 'Grand Theory' – inspired by psychoanalytic theory, semiotics, French structuralism and post-structuralism – is better described as 'aesthetics or philosophy'; such an approach should nonetheless be set aside, Rodowick argues, in favour of an ethically oriented humanistic 'film philosophy' (as distinct from theory) (Rodowick 2007a: 100).[6] Indeed, the philosophical approaches to cinema in Cavell and Deleuze – which inspired what I am calling film-philosophy – can contribute, as Rodowick remarks, to 'a philosophy of the humanities critically and reflexively attentive in equal measure to its epistemological and ethical commitments' (2007a: 92). For Rodowick, however, the combined analytic-cognitivist attack on 'Theory' for its lack of scientific credibility and philosophical cogency has had the unfortunate effect of serving as 'a de facto epistemological dismissal of the humanities' (2007a, 98). Whether Rodowick's sweeping statement is true of 'the humanities' in general – and there are good reasons to distinguish 'Theory' from 'the humanities' and to acknowledge that some social-scientific approaches have been as critical of 'Theory' as Bordwell and Carroll have – the point remains that psychoanalytic-semiotic film theory was subjected to critique for its theoretical and argumentative shortcomings as well as for its ethico-political justifications for speculative theoretical claims.[7]

At the risk of generalisation, we can define contemporary philosophical work on film via a number of competing currents. While psychoanalytical and semiotic orthodoxies have entered a decline, other theoretical perspectives remain important (cultural studies, media theory, post-colonialism, gender studies, reception studies, production histories, historical and cross-cultural approaches and so on). On the other hand, 'post-Theory', cognitivism, analytic philosophy and more recently neuroscience and evolutionary bioculturalist approaches have coalesced into a formidable research paradigm. The latter maintains that film studies, ideally, should draw on the best available science, be compatible with philosophical naturalism and demonstrate, where possible, cumulative, testable results. This does not mean, however, that film theory should become a science, or take natural scientific models as its foundation or basis, or be required to produce scientifically quantifiable results (although empirical research is welcome) (see Nannicelli and Taberham 2014). Rather, the claim is that, among other theoretical approaches, engagement with naturalistic approaches – whether natural scientific or social scientific – can make an important contribution to addressing shared problems defining the philosophical theorisation of film, even those more traditionally associated with ideological and cultural-political concerns (see Plantinga 2018; Smith 2017). We can define these competing approaches, respectively, as the *culturalist-historicist* versus the *cognitivist-naturalist* approaches to film.[8]

Against these currents we can also point to the recent emergence of film-philosophy as a distinctive approach, the founding figures of which I take to be Cavell and Deleuze (see also Elsaesser 2019: 19–22). Their groundbreaking works treated film as an artform capable of engaging in a distinctly cinematic exploration of philosophically important problems (such as scepticism, movement, time and thought), and one that could provoke philosophy to respond conceptually to what film explores through projected image-worlds (see Cavell 1979, 1981, 1996; Deleuze 1986, 1989). A number of important works, inspired by Cavell and/or Deleuze, have appeared in recent years, distinguished by their critical performance of variations on the film-philosophy theme (Bersani and Dutoit 2004; Brown 2013a; Elsaesser 2019; Frampton 2006; Früchtl 2017; LaRocca 2020; Martin-Jones 2006, 2019; Mulhall 2002, 2008; Mullarkey 2009; Peretz 2008; Phillips 2008; Pippin 2010, 2012, 2017, 2020; Pisters 2012; Rushton 2011). Such a perspective is distinct from the more conventional 'philosophy of film', which is usually, but not exclusively, affiliated with the cognitivist-naturalist approach, although there are also interesting crosscurrents between dominant traditions (see Mullarkey 2009: 133–155; Sinnerbrink 2019a).

To anticipate the argument that I shall develop in this book, one thing that distinguishes the approaches of Cavell and Deleuze from prevailing Anglo-American philosophy of film is their questioning of the 'Platonic prejudice' against art, or what Arthur Danto has called the 'philosophical disenfranchisement of art' (1986): the attempt to subsume works of art into a philosophical discourse that enables us to master, comprehend and subordinate the work to theoretical or moral concerns. Along with Cavell and Deleuze, other film philosophers (such as Jacques Rancière 2004, 2006) have engaged in similar critiques of this Platonic prejudice concerning film (see Wartenberg 2007: 15–31), highlighting the significance of affect, pleasure and thought in our experience of film. What unites many of these thinkers is another anti-Platonic gesture: an ethico-political commitment to the inherent *egalitarianism* of the cinema as a genuinely popular technological artform that has inherently *democratic* potentials. By virtue of its technological capabilities of recording, cinema is able to make any subject or event worthy of audiovisual temporal presentation, bestowing a visual presence and aesthetic fascination upon the most ordinary objects or scenes. It exercises a generous 'ontological equality' between all kinds of entities, whether persons, objects or events, depicted on screen (see Cavell 1979: 37). Indeed, it belongs to what Rancière calls the *aesthetic regime of art*, which undoes the hierarchical orders of representation structuring more traditional regimes, opens up experience to a plurality of forms of representation, and thus anticipates the possibility of an aesthetic critique of more hierarchical or alienated forms of modern experience (2004: 20–30). It is this third philosophical approach to film – the emergence of *film-philosophy* – that I explore in later chapters of this book, as well as the possibility of a distinctive kind of 'cinematic thinking' that resists reduction to philosophical theory.

Why Philosophy of Film Now?

A brief look at the history of film theory shows that philosophy and film share a longstanding affinity. All the great classical film theorists – Münsterberg, Arnheim, Balázs, Eisenstein, Bazin, Kracauer, Morin and the like – engaged in philosophical reflection: on film as an art, as a medium, in regard to its ontology, on the question of realism, on cinematic expression and on its cultural-ideological significance (see Colman 2009; Herzogenrath 2017; Rawls, Neiva and Gouveia 2019). After this promising start, however, philosophical reflection on film remained more or less dormant in the

Anglophone world.[9] Leading philosopher of film Noël Carroll cites both historical and intellectual reasons for this peculiar state of affairs (2008). Historically speaking, as Carroll notes, it has taken a couple of generations for there to be enough philosophers (within the Anglophone world) conversant with film to create a 'critical mass' of philosophically minded film theorists (2008: 1–2). Intellectually speaking, film theory abandoned its traditional 'philosophical' concerns, seemingly in the late 1980s and 1990s, and embraced a 'culturalist' approach that left, in Carroll's words, an intellectual vacuum that philosophers have been eager to fill (2008: 2). By 'philosophy' Carroll means specifically Anglo-American philosophy, rather than the broad sweep of European as well as other Anglophone traditions. As for the 'intellectual vacuum' claim, Carroll implies that the film theory produced during those decades was in crisis, had begun to decline in relevance, and thus was ripe for philosophical supplantation. On this view, philosophy's intervention, at least to its adherents, was to save film theory from intellectual irrelevance and moral-political corruption. Unsurprisingly, sympathetic philosophers and film theorists have often met this 'humanitarian intervention' with a mixture of exasperation and irritation (see Brown 2010; Frampton 2006). So what was this crisis in film theory to which philosophy responded so enthusiastically?

Although I shall consider the critique of 'Grand Theory' in more detail in Chapter 1, we can sum up this critique, in the meantime, as resting on the rejection of psychoanalytic, hermeneutic and ideological-critical approaches to theorising film. At the same time, the strongly political orientation of earlier forms of film theory – its explicit commitment to Marxist and feminist theory and politics – has been significantly neutered or replaced in recent years with a renewed focus on related strands of identity politics recalling the 'cultural politics' of the 1990s. Indeed, the emerging paradigm of philosophical film theory went 'back to the future', seeking to retrieve some of the traditional problems of classical film theory, and addressing these by drawing on the resources of analytic philosophy, cognitivist psychology and related empirical disciplines (including neuroscience and evolutionary biology). It could be described as a *naturalistic* rather than *hermeneutic* paradigm (more concerned with explanatory theories drawing upon the natural sciences than humanistic forms of reflection, analysis or interpretation). The new paradigm embraces empirical and cognitivist psychology, the argumentative techniques of analytic philosophy, rejects basing theoretical inquiry on ideological-critical and politically committed approaches, and downplays the former paradigm's central emphasis on film interpretation as key to film theorisation. Call this the *analytic-cognitivist*

paradigm of film theory (an ungainly rubric that nonetheless captures shared features of the new paradigm).

But does this account tell the whole story? Although there is a link between the dismissal of 'Continental'-style film theory and the rise of the new philosophy of film, the picture involves far more than a shift from 'Continental' to analytic-cognitivist paradigms. There are important thinkers, for example, who do not readily fit into this neat division (like Stanley Cavell). There are 'Continentals' whose work on film is rationalist in orientation (like Alain Badiou 2005); 'Continental' thinkers whose philosophy of film has certain 'cognitivist' elements (like Merleau-Ponty, even Deleuze); and theorists whose work crosses over between cognitivism, ethics, cultural theory and 'Continental' phenomenology or philosophy (see Brown 2013a, Buckland 2009a, 2009b; Laine 2011; Pisters 2012; Sobchack 1992; Stadler 2008). As these remarks suggest, the most interesting work in this emerging field cuts across this divide in exciting and innovative ways, retaining what was most valuable in the older paradigm but sharpening its theoretical focus thanks to the new one. There are now endeavours underway to overcome the 'divide' between humanistic and naturalistic approaches, and to find new ways of theorising film in a pluralistic manner, a 'third culture' approach that would overcome the opposition between the 'two cultures' of science and the humanities (see Smith 2017). So how should we describe the competing contemporary approaches to philosophising on film?

Philosophy of Film and Film-Philosophy

Here I would like to propose a distinction between two ways of doing 'film and philosophy': 1) *philosophy of film*, a theoretical explanatory approach to examining recognised or established aesthetic problems arising from the medium, reflecting on and analysing the nature of film and our experience of it from a philosophical point of view; and 2) *film-philosophy*, an aesthetic, self-reflective, exploratory or experimental approach that investigates the encounter between film and philosophy, putting philosophy into dialogue with film as an alternative way of thinking, and exploring the idea that film can contribute to philosophical understanding via cinematic means.

Philosophy of film belongs to the traditional 'theories of X' approach that seeks to provide, for example, a conceptual definition of, empirical

investigation into or philosophical critique of theories claiming to account for X (where 'X' means film, motion pictures, moving images and so on). In the 'philosophy of X' approach, philosophy analyses and theorises its object conceptually precisely because the latter cannot do so. Philosophy of film is essentially a part of aesthetics, which for a long time had ignored cinema, despite Ricciotto Canudo's acknowledgment of it as *le septieme art* back in the 1920s. Early and later film theorists (e.g. Münsterberg, Balázs and Arnheim) drew on philosophical aesthetics in order to theorise the new medium. Film theory, however, soon departed from aesthetics and phenomenology (which survived in figures like Dufrenne, Ayfre and Meunier), and adopted semiology, psychoanalytic theory and Marxist-Brechtian theories of ideology as preferred theoretical approaches. Within the Anglophone world, moreover, cinema remained a neglected, even precarious precinct of the artworld, only rarely frequented and then only perfunctorily, which is why philosophers like Danto and Cavell drew on Panofsky (1997 [1934]) and Bazin (1967 [1958–1959]) in their reflections on the ontology of cinema (see Danto 1979 and Cavell 1979 [1971]). Today, however, philosophy of film has become an accepted, even respectable, part of the field of aesthetics, which has been energised by the 'naturalistic turn' embracing cognitivist psychology, bioculturalism and the neurosciences, and begun to explore more pluralistic, interdisciplinary encounters between philosophical traditions and perspectives (see Wartenberg 2015 [2004]).

The alternative position, 'film-philosophy', is a style of philosophical exploration that questions the common tendency to privilege conceptual theorisation over film aesthetics (see Sinnerbrink 2019a). Film-philosophy argues that film should be regarded as engaging in philosophically relevant reflection via the medium of film itself, or approached as being capable of a distinctively *cinematic* kind of thinking (as I explore in Part III of this book). It is a way of aesthetically disclosing, perhaps also transforming, our experience of the modern world through cinema; one that prompts philosophy to reflect upon its own limits or even to experiment with new forms of philosophical expression thanks to its encounter with cinema. Film-philosophy, which I suggest emerges in its current form largely inspired by Deleuze and Cavell, provides an alternative tradition of philosophical film theory – a term accommodating both philosophy of film and film-philosophy – that overlaps with philosophy of film in its concern with film aesthetics as well as the moral-ethical dimensions of cinematic experience. It is an approach that treats cinema less as an object of theoretical analysis than a partner in dialogue or provocation to thought.

From this point of view, what I am calling film-philosophy has a history traceable to the early days of film theory. The latter was generally inspired to treat film by subsuming it under the traditional canon of the fine arts, only to find that this new hybrid medium posed challenges and raised possibilities no longer intelligible within these inherited canons of art. Thinkers and practitioners in the more radical and speculative wing of film-philosophy, such as Jean Epstein, proclaimed that cinema was a new mode of thinking, one that traversed and perhaps even surpassed philosophy, or that called for a new way of expressing this distinctively cinematic mode of thought (Sinnerbrink 2013a). Although this more speculative dimension of film-philosophy – what critics like Paisley Livingston (2006) would later call the 'bold' film as philosophy thesis – survives in some strands of contemporary Deleuzian film-philosophy (for example, Frampton's *Filmosophy*, 2006), the more 'moderate' version of film-philosophy, drawing not only on Deleuze or Cavell but on phenomenology, critical theory (Walter Benjamin) and various strands of Continental philosophy (from Heidegger and Levinas to Nancy and Rancière), has become a thriving ethico-aesthetic counterpart to the more theoretically oriented analytic-cognitivist philosophy of film (see Botz-Bornstein 2011; Colman 2009; Westfall 2018).

Instead of mapping these competing approaches onto the dubious analytic/'Continental' divide, we might do better to rethink these as expressing a distinction between *rationalist* and *romanticist* approaches to theorising film. These categories better capture the pertinent differences between practitioners of the philosophy of film and advocates of film-philosophy. Rationalist approaches to theory seek to provide explanatory models of various aspects of film experience. They elaborate empirically grounded models of our experience of moving images, of film ontology, of how we understand film narrative and so on, and stress the importance of explanatory general theories relevant to particular aspects of cinema and our experience of it. Romanticist approaches, for their part, seek to reflect upon, interpret or extend the kind of aesthetic experience that film evokes; they explore the ways in which cinema itself might be understood as an artistic medium that is also a medium of thought. Rationalist approaches tend to embrace various forms of naturalism in aesthetics and be concerned with questions of ontology and traditional aesthetics. Romanticist approaches tend to be more speculative, constructivist and hermeneutic in orientation, concerned with questions pertaining to metaphysics and ontology, but also adopt more transformative conceptions of aesthetics, ethics and politics. They seek not only to explain and comprehend but to question and transform our understanding of film experience and its

philosophical dimensions. They do not focus on conceptual analyses or explanatory theories so much as describe and analyse the aesthetic experience of cinema, and its ethical and political implications, in a philosophical discourse that aims to elucidate and thus deepen our understanding of film and of the transformative aesthetic experiences it makes possible.[10]

We might think here of how this divide between these two ways of doing philosophical work on film reflects a deeper debate over how we conceptualise the relationship between science and art. Is art, including film, reducible to the kinds of explanatory theories informed by the best available science? Or does the art of film express forms of meaning that resist reduction to naturalistic explanatory accounts? Does film need philosophy in order to explain what it is and how it works? Or can philosophy benefit from and be transformed by its encounter with film as a way of thinking that complements philosophical reflection? Is there a 'third culture' that could bring together these competing traditions? How can we adopt what both philosophy of film and film-philosophy have to offer in order to broaden and deepen our experience and understanding of film? These are some of the key questions that inform the lines of inquiry and argument explored in this book.

New Philosophies of Film offers an original account of the emergence of these new approaches, maps out the conceptual terrain of debate that animates them, and offers a modest contribution to philosophical film theory by arguing for a more pluralist approach to the film-philosophy relationship. My proposal, developed in the last four chapters, is that we shift our way of thinking (and writing) in order to allow film to communicate with philosophy in more aesthetically receptive ways; this means staging an encounter between film and philosophy with the potential to bring out the philosophical contribution of film, while rendering philosophy more open to other ways of thinking. We might thereby open up new ways of *thinking with film*, approaching cinema itself as a *way of thinking*. Such an approach could help ameliorate philosophy's traditional disenfranchisement of art, while also transforming how philosophy might be put into practice in a dialogical relationship with cinema.

The 'Post-Theory' Landscape (for a Pluralist Film-Philosophy)

One of the most dramatic developments since publishing the first edition of this book has been the flourishing of film-philosophy as a recognised and

dynamic area of inquiry, spanning film theory, philosophy, aesthetics and ethics. Another has been the emergence of pluralist approaches to philosophical film theory that combine theoretical approaches or that have developed novel ways of addressing key problems arising in theorising the medium and the nature of film experience. This reflects what we might call the 'post-Theory' landscape that has become recognisable over the past decade: the rise of a variety of theoretical perspectives adding complexity, diversity and nuance to what I have described as the main currents of analytic-cognitivist and film-philosophical theory. In what follows, I sketch some of the main contours of this 'post-Theory' landscape and suggest that the pluralistic approaches to philosophical film theory that have emerged offer the most productive and promising paradigms for the future of our interdisciplinary field of inquiry.

The term 'post-Theory', originally coined by Bordwell and Carroll, referred to the analytic-cognitivist counter-current of film theory that emerged during the 1990s (see Bordwell and Carroll 1996). As I discuss next chapter, the analytic-cognitivist approach defined itself against so-called 'Grand Theory', the then dominant paradigm of psycho-semiotic film theory deriving from 1970s screen theory that incorporated elements of French poststructuralist philosophy into the theoretical frameworks of Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, structuralist semiotics, Althusserian apparatus theory and Barthesian cultural semiology. Confronting the theoretical claims of various strands of 'Grand Theory', Bordwell and Carroll, along with Richard Allen and Murray Smith (1997), Greg Currie (1995), Joseph D. Anderson (1996) and Carl Plantinga (2002), contributed to the development of a formidable research paradigm combining analytic aesthetics with cognitive psychology and other naturalistic approaches – a broad collection of related theoretical works that I have called analytic-cognitivist philosophies of film.

On the more 'Continental' side of film theory, the extraordinary uptake of Deleuze's *Cinema* books, coupled with increasing acknowledgment of Cavell's philosophical work with film, has had a major impact on the development of philosophical film theory and what I am calling 'film-philosophy'. As I discuss further in Chapter 6, after an initial 'latency' period with little attention devoted to Deleuze's monumental *Cinema* books, published in the mid- to late 1980s, the uptake of Deleuzian film philosophy accelerated dramatically from 2000 onwards, providing an alternative 'theoretical' paradigm for film theory in the wake of the demise of the 'Grand Theory' approach.[11] Over the past two decades, new waves of Deleuzian film theory/film philosophy have emerged, moving, in what one is tempted to

call a 'dialectical' manner, from initial enthusiastic and faithful exegetical explication of Deleuze's concepts, to more comprehensive theoretical and philosophical reflection and criticism of Deleuze's formidable philosophical model, to creative and critical appropriations and adaptations of Deleuzian film-philosophy to a range of diverse traditions, genres, styles and film cultures, notably with an emphasis on overcoming the 'Eurocentrism' of Deleuze's perspective (see, for example, Boljkovac 2013, Martin-Jones 2011, 2019; Martin-Jones and Brown 2012; Colman 2011; del Rio 2012; Flaxman 2011; Pisters 2012; Powell 2005, 2007; Rushton 2012). Indeed, the Deleuzian paradigm of film-philosophy has also become increasingly pluralistic, incorporating elements of other theoretical and philosophical perspectives, but has also self-critically transformed itself in light of our diverse and plural contemporary film cultures and historical-cultural contexts.

The other major current is Cavellian film-philosophy, often aligned with Wittgensteinian approaches to philosophical aesthetics, which together cross over the so-called 'analytic/Continental' divide (as in Mulhall's and Rodowick's recent work, Mulhall drawing on Heidegger as well as Cavell, and Rodowick drawing on both Deleuze and Cavell). This combination of Cavellian film-philosophy, often coupled with a Wittgensteinian challenge to the primacy of 'theory', provides rich and productive ways of articulating the relationship between film and philosophy. The most prominent representative of this current is Stephen Mulhall, whose work on Wittgenstein and Cavell provided a basis for his groundbreaking text *On Film* (2002, 2008, 2016), which can be described as founding or sparking the 'film as philosophy' debate (as I discuss in Chapter 8). Mulhall's framing of the film as philosophy question – treating films not as illustrations of pre-existing philosophical ideas or frameworks but as philosophical works in their own right – has become profoundly influential as well as productively controversial. His insistence on philosophical engagement with particular films, inspired by Cavell, as well as valorising the 'primacy of the particular' in aesthetics, extended the film as philosophy debate to popular genres and films drawn from science fiction, action and thriller genres (focusing on films such as *Blade Runner*, the *Alien* tetralogy, *Minority Report* and the *Mission: Impossible* franchise). At the same time, such studies were also explicit attempts to articulate the different ways in which we can understand film as contributing to philosophy in original and distinctive ways.

A more sceptical Wittgensteinian strand of philosophical reflection on film, less 'Continental' in orientation but critical of more analytic-cognitivist approaches, can be found in the work of theorists such as Rupert Read and

Malcolm Turvey (who both differ in regard to their particular version of 'Wittgensteinian' philosophy of film). Turvey, an early critic of both 'Continental'-inspired Grand Theory and the more empirical and scientistic strains of cognitivist theory, brings a Wittgensteinian approach to both questioning the philosophical 'speculative' use of concepts in strands of Continental film-philosophy (e.g. Deleuze) as well as the scientistic tendencies of cognitivist theory (e.g. Grodal). Read, an early contributor to the 'film as philosophy' debate, brings a Wittgensteinian sensibility to film as a mode of thought, combining this with existentialist and ecological philosophy in his recent work, which contributes to the emerging current of cinematic ethics in original and creative ways. Central to Read's philosophical engagement with cinema is a profound commitment to the ways in which it can engage with, or prompt, philosophical questioning and critical reflection, particularly with respect to the existential, ethical and cultural-political challenges raised by the ecological catastrophes of global climate change, environmental destruction, species extinction and threats to biodiversity.

This emphasis on the ecological dimensions of cinematic engagement – and emergence of ecocritical approaches – points to the importance of recent ethico-politically engaged forms of philosophical film theory. This ecologically oriented current, however, is to be distinguished from the recent return of forms of philosophical film theory that have returned to the 'identity politics' concerns of the 1990s. The new wave of politically oriented film philosophical critiques, centred on contemporary forms of cultural 'identity politics', focuses on how contemporary cinemas continue to both promulgate and entrench, but also question, critique and displace, ideologically dominant forms of subjectivity, identity and social as well as culturally diverse and geopolitically inflected cultural values, norms and hierarchies. Such 'interventionist' and 'committed' modes of theoretical engagement – recalling the politically oriented modes and values of 1970s screen theory – typically foreground issues of gender diversity, 'race' and ethnicity, cultural diversity, social privilege, colonialism/post-colonialism, the critique of globalisation and the rise of ecocritical perspectives focusing on the relationship between ecology, environmental concerns and new media technologies. In short, we today find ourselves before a diverse and pluralistic 'post-Theory' landscape that reflects a diverse and pluralistic set of theoretical perspectives, not to mention cultural and intellectual contexts, with a more explicitly 'global' and inclusive emphasis. They are all, in different ways, concerned to show how philosophical film theory might address both its central theoretical problems as well as contemporary ethical and political concerns.

Design of This Book

The aim of *New Philosophies of Film* is threefold: 1) to introduce major developments in contemporary philosophies of film, from both so-called analytic and 'Continental' perspectives; 2) to argue for new ways of thinking about the film-philosophy relationship that have been opened up by theorists working between these two traditions, as well as by those concerned with the idea of film as philosophy; and 3) to explore the possibilities of a more transformative relationship *between* film and philosophy. Throughout the book, I argue that we should move beyond the adversarial battle between 'Grand Theory' and 'analytic-cognitivist' paradigms, and attempt instead to understand these new approaches as expressing two traditions or styles of thought: the *rationalist* and *romanticist* strains of philosophical film theory. I characterise these traditions by drawing the distinction between a more conventionally theoretical and explanatory *philosophy of film* and a more aesthetic, self-reflective, dialogical *film-philosophy*. The challenge for contemporary practitioners, therefore, is to find ways of overcoming the rationalist-romanticist divide; not to reprioritise one side of the binary opposition over the other, but to synthesise the theoretical acumen of philosophy of film with film-philosophy's aesthetic receptivity to film's distinctive ways of thinking.

In Part I, 'The Analytic-Cognitivist Turn', I outline the shift from so-called 'Grand Theory' to the new philosophies of film, and suggest that this shift can be understood as recapitulating some of the classical problems of film theory within a renewed theoretical paradigm (the analytic-cognitivist turn in film theory). In Chapter 1, I present an account of the crisis in film/screen theory and the Bordwell/Carroll attack on ('Continental') 'Grand Theory' that led to the analytic-cognitivist turn. In Chapter 2, I examine the return of ontology in the new philosophies of film, which retrieve and renew problems that preoccupied early film theory (such as the nature of the moving image, or the question of whether film is art). In Chapter 3, I turn to questions of narrative, authorship and 'identification' or character engagement. Contra psychoanalytic theories of identification, contemporary philosophies of film have developed sophisticated theories of narrative, authorship, affective engagement and genre. The question, however, is whether these new approaches have underplayed the role of pleasure, affect and thought that more challenging kinds of film can evoke (what I call 'cinematic thinking').

Part II, 'From Cognitivism and Phenomenology to Film-Philosophy', examines the ways in which contemporary philosophers of film have

developed a variety of theoretical responses to the problems of classical film theory. Chapter 4 examines the emergence of various cognitivist approaches, including Bordwell's and Carroll's respective accounts of narrative and Carl Plantinga's moderate cognitivist theory of affective engagement and cinematic genre. I consider both the possibilities and limits of cognitivist philosophy of film in order to make a transition to my discussion of film phenomenology in Chapter 5, which explores the question 'what is film phenomenology?', canvasses both the pluralistic strands in these approaches, focusing on embodiment, affect, subjectivity and 'identity politics'. I also consider some of the difficulties and challenges facing contemporary phenomenological approaches. Chapters 6 and 7 explore Deleuze's and Cavell's distinctive ways of doing film-philosophy as important alternatives to the predominant analytic-cognitivist trends in contemporary philosophy of film. Deleuze's version of film-philosophy focuses on conceptualising cinema from the viewpoint of the problems of movement and of time, rather than exploring individual films or genres in depth. Cavell, by contrast, develops a 'classical' ontology of film and explores its implications – in particular the problem of scepticism – by way of detailed philosophical 'readings' of individual films (belonging to genres such as the remarriage comedy or the melodrama of the unknown woman). Both thinkers share the view that film can be an important response to scepticism or nihilism – our loss of belief in the world – and thereby help us find ways of renewing a sense of connection with the world. Chapter 8 explores the provocative idea of 'film as philosophy', examining both proponents and critics of this approach to film-philosophy; I challenge some of these critiques and argue that the validity of this approach rests less on general theoretical arguments than on robust and detailed philosophical film criticism. Chapter 9 turns to the relationship between film and ethics, focusing on the 'ethical turn' in new philosophies of film and exploring the concept of cinematic ethics: the idea that film can be understood as a medium of ethical experience. This approach to the ethical potential of cinema is put into practice by considering Alfonso Cuarón's award-winning familial drama, *Roma* (2018), an aesthically rich and evocative example of how ethical and political concerns can be articulated and expressed via cinematic means.

In Part III, 'Cinematic Thinking', I elaborate the potential of these new approaches by exploring both non-fictional and fictional works by innovative and accomplished filmmakers: the philosophical documentaries *Derrida* (Kirby Dick and Amy Kofman, 2002) and *D'ailleur, Derrida* (Safaa Fathy, 1999); Lars von Trier's 'art disaster film' *Melancholia* (2011); and Charlie

Brooker's provocative dystopian 'near future' science fiction television series *Black Mirror* (2011–2019). Apart from being remarkable works in their own right, these films and television series can all be said, in different ways, to both invite and at the same time 'resist theory': to invite philosophical and ethical reflection but also to resist simple reduction to a particular philosophical thesis, theoretical problem or moral debate. In doing so, they open up new ways of thinking that present a challenge to more conventional ways of doing philosophy (of film). These provide fascinating instances of what I call *cinematic thinking*, which invites a more pluralistic and open way of thinking (and writing) philosophically with film. My exploration of the possibilities of film-philosophy concludes with an imagined debate between critics and defenders of the idea of film-philosophy, one of whom argues for taking further steps along this path of cinematic thinking. By staging this encounter between film and philosophy, and exploring different ways that cinema can elicit philosophical and ethical experiences, my hope is that this book will suggest new ways of rethinking the film-philosophy relationship and open up new ways of thinking about cinema itself as a way of thinking.[12]

Part I

The Analytic-Cognitivist Turn

1 The Empire Strikes Back: Critiques of 'Grand Theory'
2 The Rules of the Game: New Ontologies of Film
3 Adaptation: Philosophical Approaches to Narrative

In Part I of this book I introduce some of the new approaches to philosophising on film, which I have dubbed the analytic-cognitivist paradigm, analysing the related strands of its critique of the preceding model of film theorising, so-called 'Grand Theory'. This approach has produced a host of powerful theories addressing philosophical, psychological and aesthetic aspects of film (see Livingston and Plantinga 2009). In Chapter 1, I examine the influential critique of 'Grand Theory' developed during the 1990s by David Bordwell, Noël Carroll, Richard Allen, Murray Smith and a host of other theorists. Underlying this critique is a dispute between competing ways of doing philosophy, associated with the vexed analytic/'Continental' philosophy divide (see Critchley 2001; Glendinning 2006; Sinnerbrink 2010). After addressing the critique of 'Grand Theory', I examine Carroll's philosophy of film (his 'dialectical cognitivism'), which argues against 'medium essentialism' (the idea that film has a definable medium that would determine aesthetic style and value); against interpretation (which conflates film theory with film

criticism); and against the 'film as language' thesis (that language provides an appropriate model for theorising film). I also consider Bordwell's related critique of film hermeneutics and of speculative film theory, suggesting that there are problems with Bordwell's critique of the hermeneutic (interpretative) approach to film. Although generating a rich array of new theoretical work, the analytic-cognitivist turn can also be challenged for its sometimes 'reductionist' approach to the complex aesthetic, hermeneutic and ideological dimensions of film. In good dialectical fashion, the challenge is to incorporate theoretical innovations in the new approaches, yet retain what remains valuable in the older paradigms. The aim, in short, is to avoid both *reductionism* and *dogmatism* (the bugbear of so-called 'Grand Theory').

1

The Empire Strikes Back: Critiques of 'Grand Theory'

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The Philosophical Turn in Film Theory

As Adrian Martin observes (2006), every 15 years or so film studies seem to undergo a distinctive kind of theoretical 'turn'. From the psychoanalytic turn of the 1960s and 1970s through the historiographic turn of the 1980s and 1990s, we now find ourselves, Martin remarks, in the midst of a 'philosophic turn' that was sparked by Deleuze's *Cinema* books in France and Cavell's works in the United States (2006: 76). In the 15 years or more since Martin's observation, we still appear to be working through this philosophical turn (see Elsaesser 2019; Rawls, Neiva and Gouveia 2019). As Martin remarks, the Deleuzian turn was followed by 'various certified philosophers exploring their passions for cinema – Bernard Stiegler, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Rancière, among others' (2006: 76). To explain this

'philosophical turn' in film theory, some philosophers have cited the general cultural popularity of film, its pedagogical potential (particularly for teaching philosophy) and the rise of cognitivist approaches in psychology and philosophy of mind (see Carroll 2008; Gaut 2010; Shaw 2008). Although these are all relevant factors, the most obvious reasons for the turn were institutional and theoretical: the collapse of what Bordwell and Carroll (1996) called 'Grand Theory' – 1970s and 1980s film theory that combined psychoanalytic, semiotic and ideologico-critical perspectives – and its replacement by historicist, culturalist and media-oriented approaches. In the so-called 'theoretical vacuum' that followed the demise of 'Grand Theory' and the cultural-historicist turn, so Carroll claims, philosophy offered the theoretical resources required to renew the 'classical' problems of film theory that had been left in abeyance by the previous paradigm (see Carroll 1988a, 1988b).

Whatever their theoretical orientations, the new wave of 'post-Theory' philosophers of film defined themselves against the older paradigm of institutionalised film theory of the 1970s and 1980s inspired by psychoanalysis, structuralism, semiotics, cultural theory and various strands of German critical theory and French post-structuralism.[1] The title of Noël Carroll's 1988 book says it all: *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (1988a).[2] The new philosophical film theory challenging the prevailing theoretical models styled itself as analytic rather than 'Continental' in inspiration; cognitivist rather than psychoanalytic in approach; scientistic rather than hermeneutic in orientation; concerned with drawing upon and applying empirical research rather than engaging in speculation or interpretation. It aimed at a 'rational' understanding of film rather than at plumbing unconscious desire; and was concerned to use plain language and theoretical arguments rather than what critics derided as metaphysical jargon. With its preference for analytical argument and empirically testable models, analytic-cognitivist film theory has become an increasingly influential approach to the philosophical study of film.

The story becomes intriguing at this point, for the new philosophers of film were challenging a very specific theoretical approach. Noël Carroll usefully distinguishes between the then 'contemporary film theory' (semiological approaches that also drew on psychoanalytical and Marxist theories of ideology) and 'classical film theory', which included earlier theorists (like Arnheim and Bazin) along with more recent ones (such as V. F. Perkins and Stanley Cavell) (1988a: 1).[3] According to Carroll, semiological film theory had a first wave (for example, Christian Metz), taking its inspiration from linguist Ferdinand de Saussure; and then a second wave (1970s screen theory), in which this semiological approach was

combined with (Lacanian) psychoanalytic and (Althusserian) Marxist theories of ideology. This second wave of film theory also acquired a political inflection during the mid- to late 1970s through the feminist analysis of gender and a critique of the ideological function of Hollywood film.

The Critique of 'Grand Theory'

Noël Carroll's critique of 'Grand Theory' targets its uncritical commitment to eclectic strains of 'Continental' philosophy (1996: 37–68). Indeed, Carroll identifies what we might call 'five obstructions', pace Lars von Trier, to what he argued were more rationally defensible ways of theorising on film, difficulties that stem, he claims, from the flawed foundation of 'Continental' theory:

1) *A monolithic conception of film theory*, according to which a 'foundational' theoretical paradigm is assumed to account for all relevant aspects of film; this is linked with an implausible 'medium essentialism', which sought to explain all relevant phenomena in terms of the film medium.
2) *The conflation of film theory with film interpretation*, according to which film theorists adopt a theoretical framework (Lacanian psychoanalysis, for example), and then 'confirm' the theory in question by finding its concepts or ideas instantiated in specific film examples, which are interpreted using the adopted theoretical framework in a question-begging, circular manner.
3) *Political correctness*, 'culture wars' rhetoric aside, this unfortunate term refers to the criticism that the progressive ethico-political claims of film theory were rendered plausible or defensible thanks to their solidarity with emancipatory social-political movements (of the 1960s and 1970s and beyond). More particularly, it refers to the dogmatic defence of theoretical claims, concepts or analyses because of their political value, utility or contribution to emancipatory movements or causes rather than their theoretical cogency, explanatory power or evidentiary basis.
4) *Charges of formalism*, according to which ways of theorising about film without a 'political' or ideological focus are dismissed as 'formalist' or as lacking substantive content; or the unwarranted rejection of theoretical claims as ethico-politically vacuous because of their theoretical rather than practical focus.

5) *Biases against truth*, which refers to the postmodernist dismissal of truth as an ideological construct, a relativist claim that rests on an untenable 'argument from absolute truth' (any truth claim about film presupposes an absolutist concept of truth; there is no such concept; *ergo* truth claims about film are 'ideologically suspect', hence false or pernicious) (Carroll 1996: 38–56).

Taken together, these five obstructions hampered philosophical theorisation of film, Carroll argued, prompting the need for a 'paradigm shift' towards more analytic-cognitivist forms of theory that were not beholden to these ethico-political constraints (Carroll 1996: 56–68).

There are two features of so-called 'Grand Theory' deemed most troubling by analytic-cognitivist critics: 1) the 'decentred' conception of the human subject whose claims to rational autonomy are undermined by the role of the unconscious in psychic life, and by the shared background structures of language, culture and ideology; and 2) the conviction that film, whether in its popular or modernist forms, is not just an art or popular cultural audiovisual medium but an ideologico-political battleground over forms of social and cultural representation (in particular, of gender, sexuality, class, race and cultural identity). The upshot of these two theses – the challenge to rational autonomy (posited by psychoanalytic theory), and the ideologico-political function of film (posited by Marxist and feminist theory) – was to suggest that film theory provided a privileged site for the examination of psychic mechanisms of desire, theories of gendered subjectivity and for the related critique of social and cultural ideology.

Indeed, the paradigm of 'Grand Theory', whatever its theoretical shortcomings, clearly questioned two key assumptions of the new analytic-cognitivist paradigm: 1) that the human being is a rational autonomous agent whose cognitive powers are not completely beholden to irrational 'unconscious' forces or to ideological manipulation to the extent assumed by 'Grand Theory'; and 2) that film as a popular form of entertainment is not principally defined by its ideological function, and that it operates in the main by using transparent visual and narrative techniques (rather than learned social and semiotic 'codes'). Hence movies can be analysed and understood in broadly 'naturalistic' terms (with reference to psychological, physiological, biological, neurological as well as evolutionary processes). In short, the battle between 'Grand Theory' and the analytic-cognitivist paradigm turned on our assumptions concerning *human nature* and the relationship between *subjectivity and culture*. To what extent are we rational beings, unperturbed by unconscious or ideological forces? And to what

extent does film – *the* mass artform of the modern age – have the primary function of serving ideological ends?

Suffice to say, these are difficult and important philosophical questions that cannot be answered glibly here. I raise them in order to signal that there are deeper issues at stake in the dispute between competing paradigms in film theory. Indeed, it is not obvious that these questions have been settled either way. This point has been forgotten in the fractious debates over 'Grand Theory' and its critics, and remains pertinent today given the analytic-cognitivist turn in film theory. After an initial standoff, the pendulum swing between the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' practised by 'Grand Theory' and the analytic-cognitivist defence of a rational, commonsense approach to the movies gained increasing momentum. Although there has been some rapprochement between these competing approaches, the opposition between the more 'objective/neutral' approach of post-Theory analytic-cognitivist theory and the 'politically committed' approach of post-Theory 'Continental' and neo-ideological approaches – focusing, for example, on gender, 'race', anti-colonialism, global capitalism and so on – remains a defining feature of our theoretical and interdisciplinary context (see Shohat and Stam 1994, 2003; Stam 2000). At the same time, many of the issues and debates that marked the earlier wave of the critique of Grand Theory are returning in a revised form, so it is worth revisiting these in order to understand our context in a more reflective and critical manner.

Criticisms of 'Grand Theory'

Carroll's polemical critique of 'Grand Theory' was intended to challenge the dogmas of a once dominant paradigm in crisis, and to advocate in its stead a more rationally defensible model of film theorisation. Despite its 1990s 'culture wars' rhetoric, it is worth making some critical remarks on this critique, which was crucial for the development of what we might call 'post-Theory theory'. I shall take each of Bordwell/Carroll's 'five obstructions' facing film theory in turn.

1) Monolithic Theory and 'Medium Essentialism'

One of the sharpest criticisms of 'Grand Theory' was that it adopted an all-encompassing theoretical paradigm – psychoanalytical, semiotic and

so on – that was used to account for the manifold aspects of film. There is some truth to the claim that 'Grand Theory' relied on all-encompassing theories, even though these were not 'monolithic' in the sense of being homogeneous or univocal. It is worth recalling, moreover, that the motivation for doing so was to account for the two assumptions outlined above: that human subjects are subject to 'irrational' forces that conflict with our rational capacities; and that film is not only an accessible medium of mass entertainment but also a complex instrument of ideological influence. That is why 'Grand Theory', far from being 'monolithic', was characterised by various theoretical 'fusions' (psychoanalytic-semiotic theory, psychoanalytical-feminist theory, structural linguistic-ideology critique and so on). 'Grand Theory' may have struggled to find theoretically convincing ways of articulating these two assumptions, but it was at least concerned to question the view that human subjects are rational masters of their conscious experience, and to critique the medium of film for its role as a powerful ideological force. In taking a more systemic approach to understanding the ideological role of cinema in the formation of subjectivity, 'Grand Theory' did run the risk of lapsing into a monolithic – or 'totalising' – mode of theorisation; but it also provided ways of conceptualising both the 'deeper' unconscious dimensions of cinematic experience and the broader ideological significance of the medium. As for the latter, although earlier forms of film theory did tend to adopt something like a 'medium essentialism' position (apparatus theory, for example), later forms of 'Grand Theory', thanks to their focus on subjectivity and ideology, tended to ignore questions of the medium and its putative character and aesthetic features – an omission that remains an issue today. Indeed, the recent return to focusing on the ontology of film, especially with the rise of digital media, has directed attention towards this important question within the new philosophies of film.

2) Conflation of Film Theory with Film Criticism

One striking element in this critique is the assertion that 'Grand Theory' conflated 'film theory' with 'film criticism', confusing theoretical claims about film with hermeneutic claims about the interpretation of particular films or genres (Allen and Smith 1997: 6). As a result, post-Theorists generally insist on a firm distinction between film theory and film criticism, arguing that the two should be kept apart, lest we lapse into the 'fallacy of exemplification' – 'proving' the claims of a theory via selective film interpretations – to which

'Grand Theory' was supposedly prone.[4] An example would be to assume the validity of, say, the Lacanian 'mirror stage' or Althusser's doctrine of 'ideological state apparatuses', then cherry pick certain film scenes or cinematic examples that neatly 'illustrate' these theories (say, from Hitchcock or Godard), and thereby claim that such examples provide 'evidence' supporting our theoretical claims. This would be an example of the 'fallacy of exemplification': conflating the use of a theoretical heuristic to interpret films with such interpretations serving as evidentiary support for theoretical claims we might make using these films.

One consequence of this critique, however, has been to establish a sharper divide between film theory and film criticism: the proliferation of theories analysing film in general that remain aloof or separated from the detailed analysis of particular films, save as useful illustrations of general theoretical problems being examined by the theory (see, for example, Carroll 2008; Gaut 2010). It is one thing to say that theory should be general in scope and explanatory in nature; it is another to claim that such theorising should therefore avoid focusing on particular, anomalous or deviant cases as might be studied in film criticism. Moreover, theoretical issues frequently arise in regard to film criticism (concerning, for example, authorship, aesthetic evaluation and moral-ethical concerns), just as film criticism might raise issues that are theoretically significant or shed light on theoretical debates (concerning the role of certain aesthetic features, use of stylistic techniques or how narrative film might function or be understood in particular cases). Aesthetic theories, including philosophies of film, find their rigour and plausibility to the degree that they illuminate our experience and understanding of singular works of art. A theoretical claim readily challenged by, or at odds with, various film examples, which can serve as 'empirical' case studies in this regard, would hardly count as convincing or persuasive.

3) 'Political Correctness'

A regrettably pejorative phrase, deriving from the 'culture wars' rhetoric of the 1990s, the charge of 'political correctness' conjures up images of stoical cultural warriors fighting off the barbarians at the university gates (or alternatively, of committed cultural warriors battling to seize or destroy the cultural citadels of the academy). Shorn of its unpleasant rhetorical and ideological aspects, it refers to the manipulation of theory or rejection of valid theoretical inquiry due to implicit ideological commitments (at least according to those making the criticism) vitiating such theories or

condemning the moral-ethical character, conduct or identity of its defenders. To be sure, any attempt to stymie theoretical reflection in the name of ideological or political orthodoxy is deserving of criticism; but so is a refusal to acknowledge criticism or stance of political vacuity, namely, an indifference towards the larger social, cultural, historical and ideological forces that also contribute to the context of film production, circulation and reception. The reduction of theoretical inquiry to political partisanship is destructive and coercive; but the quarantining of theoretical inquiry from critical reflection concerning its (implicit) moral-political or ideological commitments is also limiting and blinding. Critical inquiry, especially into a medium as culturally and ethically significant as film, should be able to accommodate both perspectives, bringing one to bear on the other. Although some theorists deride attempts to explore the ideological dimensions of film, few would deny that film remains 'ideological' in some respects. Indeed, some cognitivists have acknowledged that this remains an important topic to be addressed (see Plantinga 2009a: 12–14, 2018: 135–139). The relationship between the empirical social, economic and historical circumstances of a film's production or reception within broader cultural-ideological fields remains an important question, especially for those pursuing a methodologically pluralist approach. A robust pluralistic approach to philosophising on and with film should exemplify free and impartial inquiry, be free to respond to appropriate criticisms, as well as acknowledge implicit ethico-political commitments, biases or blind spots in its own mode of theorisation.

4) and 5) Formalism and Biases against Truth

The complaint concerning so-called 'biases against truth' is fair enough, assuming it is true that such theories have the kind of bias attributed to them by their critics. Here the classic critique of 'Grand Theory' sometimes runs of the risk of caricature or 'straw man' arguments in its presentation of such theories, translating their claims in reductive terms, or else construing them as narrowly concerned with problems of interest to contemporary philosophers.[5] Nonetheless, Carroll and other critics of 'Grand Theory' were right to insist that questions of truth and falsity remain important in film theory, no matter what kind of inquiry we might pursue. At the same time, we should avoid assuming that there is only one paradigm of knowledge – modelled exclusively on the natural sciences – that can provide the only

proper foundation for philosophising on film. Different kinds of inquiry might call for different approaches, concepts, methodologies and arguments, but this kind of epistemic pluralism need not be hostile to claims concerning truth and falsity. On the contrary, the practice of critical reflection and theoretical contestation assumes as much in order to enable practices of theory contestation to take place. At the same time, it is important to be aware of levels of theoretical explanation or critical engagement when dealing with particular theoretical problems, arguments or debates. There is as little to be gained in accusing, say, cognitive neuroscience of 'Eurocentrism' as in criticising 'intersectionality' for logical inconsistency. This is not to deny the importance of scientifically informed theorising, or to 'police' the latter in light of ideological purity, but to point out that the relationship between philosophical naturalisms and the theorisation of art remains a subject of philosophical debate. Indeed, it is part of what we reflect on when we do philosophy of film, and what might enable us to find common ground in developing genuinely pluralistic forms of philosophical film theory.

The important question to be drawn from these remarks on the critique of 'Grand Theory' is how the new philosophies of film are to navigate the twin perils of *dogmatism* (stereotypically attributed to 'Grand Theory') and *reductionism* (stereotypically attributed to analytic-cognitivist theory). On the one hand, theorists within the analytic-cognitivist paradigm sometimes court the risk of assuming a too narrow conception of what counts as knowledge, thus dismissing alternative ways of thinking about film as mere 'pseudo-argumentation'. On the other hand, 'Continental'-inspired theorists can court the danger of reproducing theoretical dogmatism in their assumption of a conceptual framework – or favoured master thinker – that is then applied uncritically to various aspects of film, or reductively flattening robust theoretical inquiry to a form of cultural-political activism pursued by other means. The challenge for the new philosophies of film, therefore, is to steer a successful course between the Scylla of dogmatism and the Charybdis of reductionism. It is to find new ways of creatively synthesising, rather than cynically dismissing, alternative theoretical frameworks and critical philosophical perspectives.

Carroll's Dialectical Cognitivism

Noël Carroll's 'piecemeal' or middle-level approach to cognitive theory is perhaps the most paradigmatic of the post-Theory approaches to emerge in

recent decades.[6] Carroll's approach, which he dubs 'dialectical cognitivism', draws on cognitive psychology and analytic philosophy and argues against three pervasive assumptions held within the 'Grand Theory' paradigm. 1) It criticises '*medium essentialism*' (the view that there are particular essential features of film as a medium that both define it and determine its aesthetic possibilities). 2) It is against *interpretation* (the idea that the primary task of film theory is to provide critical interpretations of films drawing on an assumed theoretical framework). And 3), it rejects the '*film as language*' thesis (the idea that language or semiotic 'codes' provide a privileged theoretical model for theorising film). Carroll's approach is 'dialectical', in that it captures how competing theories attempt to dialectically supersede each other by correcting the errors of previous theories. It is 'cognitivist' in that it shows how film viewing involves cognitive phenomena amenable to rational analysis according to empirically grounded psychologies or naturalistic theories of mind. Let us consider each of these three aspects of Carroll's critique of 'Grand Theory'.

1) Against 'Medium Essentialism'

Since the late 1980s, Noël Carroll has been arguing against *medium essentialism*: the pervasive assumption, part theoretical, part aesthetic, that 'each artform has its own distinctive medium' distinguishing it from other artforms (Carroll 2006a: 113–114). Such a view, moreover, claims that identifying this medium has important theoretical and aesthetic consequences (for example, extolling the virtues of cinematic realism as a proper realisation of the possibilities of the medium). From Eisenstein's valorisation of montage, to Bazin's championing of deep-focus, philosophers of film have followed classical aesthetics in attempting to define a distinctive medium (in physical and material senses) proper to film, and on that basis to argue for the kind of aesthetic possibilities that film can realise. 'Grand Theory' too, for its part, made use of the medium essentialism thesis, arguing, for example, that the nature of the cinematic apparatus determined both the nature of Classical Hollywood narrative and the ideological capture of spectators' desire (see Baudry 2004a, 2004b; Metz 1974, 1982).

According to Carroll, received versions of medium essentialism display a number of questionable assumptions, such as the view that each artform has a distinctive medium; that the medium is also the (teleological) 'essence' of the artform, realised in appropriate works; and that the medium determines the style and/or content of the artform (2006a: 113–114). Carroll's

assumption here is that the 'medium' refers to the artform's underlying physical or material basis; the materials necessary for the creation and constitution of works of art within that artform. Such a view, however, is clearly open to criticism. V. F. Perkins (1972) offered such a critique already in the early 1970s, challenging Bazin's and Kracauer's claim that cinematic realism, with its long takes, 'naturalised' *mise-en-scène*, and unity of space and time, was therefore best suited to realise aesthetically the (photographic) nature of the medium (1972: 28–39). As Perkins argued, this orthodoxy privileged one aspect of the filmic medium at the expense of the rest, drawing implausibly rigid aesthetic conclusions from the 'realist' ontology of the moving image: 'Despite Bazin's careful qualifications and disclaimers, realist theory becomes coherent only if we identify the cinema's "essence" with a single aspect of film – photographic reproduction' (Perkins 1972: 39). It seems the 'sins of the Fathers', to quote one of Perkins' chapter titles, need to be redeemed by each new generation of film theorists.

Carroll has taken up this task with gusto, developing the most comprehensive critique of medium essentialism. How are we to define the distinctive 'medium' of a given artform? We might be tempted to nominate as 'essential' the distinctive physical or material basis of the artform, say celluloid film strip bearing 'certain photographic emulsions' (Carroll 2006a: 115) in the case of (pre-digital) film. Here we can cite numerous counterexamples, however, that refute the idea that the medium has a unique material basis (or even that it uniquely involves movement). As remarked below, the class of experimental films, without discernible images of represented objects, is a case in point, since the material itself can be directly manipulated or even destroyed in creating the work. Or consider Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), a film consisting of a deep blue visual field, mesmerising voiceover narration, and carefully composed soundtrack, presenting the narrator/filmmaker's reminiscences, experiences of increasing blindness and preparation for his impending death.[7] There is no movement, no montage, no image, save for the 'colour field' of azure that serves as a pure phenomenological background, and which attunes us to the poetic reflections of the narrator and evocative soundscape presenting his life, memory and thought. One is hard-pressed to identify the relevant 'medium' in a film such as *Blue*.

From a technological point of view, new digital video technology may eventually become indistinguishable from traditional film stock (indeed, it is close enough now, given that most movie making is short on digital video, to be regarded as the standard equivalent to traditional film style). The digital basis for moving images, moreover, is now shared with musical and sound

recordings. Implements used to make films are also inadequate to distinguish the medium, since films can readily be made without the use of cameras (for example, flicker films, scratch films and painted films, where the film strip is directly modified, inscribed or marked). As these counterexamples suggest, the attempt to identify a unique medium for film, in any physical or material sense, is problematic.[8] Rather than deny the existence of (physical) media as such, the point is to show that there are various media at play in works of art, especially in cinema.

A similar criticism can be made concerning teleological attempts to prescribe appropriate aesthetic forms for a given medium. If artforms possess a plurality of media, then there is no reason to assume that they will converge on a specific style or subject-matter. Media underdetermine the aesthetic uses to which they can be put; artforms are open to technological transformations and hence to new artistic uses. Artistic innovation involves inventing ways in which technological and practical developments can be given meaning and significance; think, for example, of the incorporation of handheld camera movements into fictional film, the integration of CGI (computer-generated image) animation into live action film, or the simulation of 'analogue' effects (visual flare, for example) within digital filmmaking practices. Does this mean that one should abandon all attempts at defining what the media of film/cinema/the moving image might be? Not at all; but it does mean that we ought to acknowledge that film/cinema/the moving image remains a dynamic artform, open to technical, aesthetic and practical innovations. Indeed, this fluidity in respect of the medium is what 'defines' film as an artform in perpetual flux.

For all its influence in contemporary film theory, Carroll's rather strict dismissal of 'medium essentialism' seems to sometimes revert to a 'straw-man' argument. Do contemporary film theorists more generally assume as rigid and prescriptive a concept of the 'medium' as Carroll avers? One can surely regard the medium (or media) as important to understanding and appreciating film without thereby being committed to an untenable 'medium essentialism' (see Gaut 2010 for a defence of a moderate 'medium' approach). Consider Stanley Cavell's alternative version of the medium of film, which is hardly essentialist in this sense (1979: 68–74). For Cavell, contra Carroll, a 'medium' is not to be confused with the physical, material or technical means by which works of art are constituted. Rather, the 'medium' names the manner in which an artform is invented and transformed; the ways found to constitute enduring works, new means of expression, and uses of technique, conventions and style that are creatively explored, inherited and renewed.

Cavell's anti-essentialist concept of medium avoids reducing film to its material or physical basis, is open to a plurality of uses and eschews aesthetic prescriptivism about conforming to a given medium's alleged 'essence'. Indeed, Cavell's conception of a 'medium' corresponds with Carroll's requirements for media plurality. The 'medium' of film is what remains to be invented by putting to work the inherited traditions, conventions and aesthetic possibilities of film in an open-ended manner.

2) Against 'Interpretation'

A second major criticism is that film theory (especially 'Grand Theory') dogmatically assumes a strongly hermeneutic model of theory: that film theories aim to provide interpretative frameworks (templates) that generate multiple interpretations of films and genres, and that such interpretations can even 'confirm' theoretically one's chosen framework. Having assumed a hermeneutic model that equates theorisation with interpretation, coupled with the assumption that film theory was ideology-critique pursued by other means, the way was paved for a dogmatic recycling of 'theoretical readings' of favoured films as a way of unmasking ideological, gender or cultural-political biases. 'Grand Theory', according to Bordwell and Carroll, remained captive to this hermeneutic paradigm, thereby blocking the development of empirically contestable forms of film theorisation.

While I shall address later how film theory and criticism might enter into a mutually beneficial relationship, it is worth commenting here on the relationship between theory and criticism, that is, the difference between *hermeneutic* and *explanatory* theories. These are distinct theoretical approaches that do quite different things. Hermeneutic theories attempt to describe, interpret or analyse with reference to other interpretative communities, contexts, approaches or traditions; explanatory theories seek to present causal explanations that solve theoretical problems, or integrate with established bodies of empirical knowledge. They do share traits that overlap in certain cases: we may wish to explain why a scene works a particular way or has a certain meaning in the context of a narrative, for example, or we may wish to show how a particular mechanism, device or process works in narrative film and use a film example, suitably interpreted, to demonstrate this. Nonetheless, these distinct theoretical approaches should not be conflated as though they were essentially pursuing the same theoretical tasks or practical ends. Does this imply that we should therefore avoid hermeneutic in favour of explanatory theories? Not at all – both film analysis or criticism and

film theorisation or philosophising on film require that we are able to avail ourselves of both approaches as the context and nature of our inquiry requires. Indeed, this kind of pluralistic, interactive approach is more pertinent than ever: enhancing film theory through philosophically informed film criticism, and developing philosophical film theory capable of both analysing and interpreting as well as conceptualising and explaining various aspects of cinematic works and our experience of them.

One problem that arises here is what we might call the 'hermeneutic gap': how to account for the relationship between a high-level explanatory theory (providing a causal account of X, couched in empirical/naturalistic terms) and the use of a particular film/film genre as an 'example' of this theory. Even strongly cognitivist film theories depend upon tacit hermeneutic models of theory when they appeal to 'film examples' to help illustrate a theoretical point or bolster a theoretical claim.[9] In such cases, a hermeneutic gap opens up between the level of general theoretical explanation and the illustration of such claims with reference to a particular film or film genre. How do we bridge this gap? One response is to erect a theoretical firewall between film theory and film criticism; but doing this leaves unanswered how we move from the general theoretical claims to our aesthetic experiences of particular films. Interpretation, however, is precisely a way of mediating between general explanatory claims and particular aesthetic experiences of particular works of art – which means that we need to be engaging with appropriate forms of hermeneutic theory (see Gadamer 1989; Yacavone 2015). This is another important challenge for the new philosophy of film: how to heal the sundered link between theory and criticism via philosophical film interpretation and critical film analysis.

3) Against the 'Film as Language' Thesis

The third decisive element of the older paradigm of film theory, challenged by Carroll's dialectical cognitivism, was the attempt to draw an analogy between film and language. From the more commonplace metaphor of film as a language, theorists such as Christian Metz developed full-blown theories of film as a species of semiotic utterance, whose character, meaning and modalities were modelled on the rules and structures governing the linguistic sign (see Metz 1974). This semiotic assimilation of the image to language was coupled with a linguistically inflected psychoanalytic account of desire and of the unconscious (structured like a language, according to Jacques Lacan). The result was a theory that tended to reduce the image to a linguistic sign;

composition, montage and visual style to literary narration; the multiform aesthetic of the movies to a structural matrix 'suturing' visual identification and ideologically manipulating narrative pleasure. This orthodoxy has been subjected to sharp critique, from Deleuze's (1986) criticism of the application of linguistic semiology to film, Carroll's dismissal of the claim that understanding movies depends upon assimilating culturally constructed semiotic 'codes' (2006a, 2008), to Gregory Currie's (1995) attack on the very idea of film as language, and the correlated view that interpretation involves 'reading' a film, modelled on literary forms of analysis. Carroll's and Currie's critiques are the most powerful of these recent challenges to the 'film as language' thesis, so I shall take these as paradigmatic of this line of argument.

The analogy between film images and language has a long and venerable history. Soviet filmmaker and theorist V. I. Pudovkin, for example, claimed that individual shots play the same role as words in the composition of a film 'sentence': '[Film] editing is the language of the film director. Just as in living speech, so one may say in editing: there is a word – the piece of exposed film, the image; a phrase – the combination of these pieces' (quoted in Carroll 2003: 14–15). From this analogy, theorists constructed a whole body of theory, drawing initially on Saussurean linguistics and later on structuralist linguistics (Roman Jakobson). Roland Barthes' cultural-semiotic analyses of ideological myths (in bourgeois popular culture) as well as of literary and cinematic texts (in his later works), offered an influential semiological approach to analysing the ideological significance of film language (Barthes 1972).

But how plausible is the comparison of a shot to a word, an edited sequence to a phrase, or a 'grammar of film' that would encompass conventional codes of representation enabling us to understand what we see? For one thing, images are more complex than words; it takes many sentences to describe even a very simple shot. For another, the relationship between a word and its meaning is dependent upon arbitrary conventions (we use the word 'dog' for canines but could have used something else). The relation of an image to its referent, by contrast, is less a matter of applying arbitrary semiotic conventions than of using our capacities for natural or 'untutored' perception in order to understand what we see (see Carroll 2003). The word 'leg' has an arbitrary relation to the limb in question, whereas a shot of Barbara Stanwyck's ankle in *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder 1944) does not. It may require some cultural knowledge to appreciate that Phyllis Dietrichson [Stanwyck] is a *femme fatale*, but not to recognise that I am seeing an arresting female character's ankle with anklet (as revealed to Walter Neff [Fred MacMurray] in their steamy introductory encounter).

As Gregory Currie points out, moreover, language depends upon the use of recursive grammatical operations to compose sentences from words and phrases (once we are familiar with them, we can apply them to ever new cases); but no such recursive operations are evident in film images or the way in which they are edited together to tell a story (1993: 209–215). Perhaps we might want to say that the conventions in question apply at the level of the combination (montage or editing) of images: that these are the arbitrary conventions that lend weight and plausibility to the film-language analogy. We might hold, for example, that the shot-reverse shot conventions of Hollywood narrative cinema are a culturally constructed 'code' that has been adopted – or even imposed – as a 'universal' film language. Comprehending the meaning of such a sequence would therefore require an act of 'decoding' it according to the relevant cinematic 'code'.

The problem with this approach, according to Carroll, is that it ignores the *pictorial* character of moving images: a shot of Walter Neff speaking, followed by Phyllis Dietrichson's facial expression in responding to him, are images that do not require 'decoding' in order to be understood (the wittiness of their playful, seductive 'speeding ticket' banter notwithstanding). Rather, we grasp what we see using the same perceptual abilities that enable us to perceive faces and expression (not to mention speech) in ordinary experience. The shot-reverse shot 'rule' is a pragmatically effective way of showing the interaction and communication between two characters; but it depends upon the same kinds of perceptual abilities we ordinarily use in order to communicate with each other. Learning a language, with its arbitrary conventions and complex rules of grammar, is an arduous and time-consuming process. Understanding moving images, however, is relatively easy (young children have no difficultly following animated as well as live action movies), as well as being cross-culturally intelligible (similar cinematic conventions are used the world over). This is best explained, Carroll argues, by the fact that moving images are parasitic upon our capacities for natural perception, and hence that such images do not require 'decoding' in order to be understood.

Now while it is true that the facility of understanding moving images points to the way our comprehension of them is parasitic upon our shared capacities for embodied perception, there is more to understanding movies than simply recognising figures moving on a screen. It is one thing to criticise a dogmatic conception of cinematic codes; it is another to argue that there are complexities of meaning that require some familiarity with cinematic conventions. Whether in the Hollywood tradition or in European/Asian/South American art cinema, many films thematise, alter or reflect upon the

conventional and representational character of narrative cinema (think of Preston Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (1939), Godard's *Breathless* (1960), Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953), Fellini's *8 ½* (1963) or Raúl Ruiz's *Three Crowns of the Sailor* (1983)). There is more to understanding Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001), Wong-Kar-wai's *In the Mood For Love* (2000), Claire Denis' *Beau travail* (1999), Kiarostami's *Shirin* (2008), Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) or Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019) than relying on 'untutored perception', or having an elementary grasp of the various images (and sounds) composing the narrative one is perceiving on the screen. Such films are also concerned to render explicit, play with or undermine a variety of conventional devices used in mainstream narrative cinema, and moreover to articulate a critical perspective on dominant (whether Hollywood or European or Asian) models of filmmaking, not to mention exploring issues and themes with broader psychological, moral and social-cultural significance. *This* is the critical dimension of most interest in claims made concerning the 'language of film'; but this dimension – the ideologico-critical significance of narrative conventions – is underplayed in critiques launched by 'post-Theory' theorists. In the rush to abolish any vestiges of the former paradigm, the ideological dimensions of narrative film have been left in abeyance. Nonetheless, the question of ideology and cinema, as I shall discuss further in later chapters, remains a pressing and important topic.

Cognitivism Goes Pluralist

Indeed, this is an area of inquiry that more recent work in cognitivist philosophy of film has sought to remedy. Recent work in cognitivist film theory offers a much wider array of approaches to the moral-ethical dimensions of film experience, and broadens the understanding of the role of emotion and cognition in our sensuous, embodied and imaginative engagement with film (see Nannicelli and Taberham 2014; Plantinga 2018; Shimamura 2013; Smith 2017). Indeed, there is a refreshing pluralism in recent cognitivism – encompassing not only 4E cognitive theories but also the crossover with phenomenological approaches – that is worth acknowledging and exploring further (as I do later in this book). We have witnessed the emergence of pluralistic approaches to cognitivist film theory, emphasising its potential crossover with other theoretical and philosophical approaches (Nannicelli and Taberham 2014; Plantinga 2009a; Shimamura 2013; Stadler

2008). There has also been increasing recognition of the need to develop a more pluralistic integration of naturalistic forms of film theory and aesthetics as contributing to the humanistic study of cinema (see Smith 2017).[10] Cognitivist approaches have become more diverse, while analytic approaches have broadened thanks to 'post-analytic' perspectives (Rachjman and West 1985); phenomenological perspectives have been adapted to cognitivist theories, while cognitivist theories have become more accommodating of phenomenological insights. This is not to say that there are no longer stark differences between cognitivist perspectives (some of which eschew natural scientific foundations, others claiming that such foundations are required for effective theory building) or that there is now a felicitous concordance, rather than fractious conflict, between competing paradigms of philosophical film theory. Indeed, there is a longer story to tell here concerning the complex, and sometimes conflictual, relationship between 'rationalist' and 'romanticist' approaches to theorising cinema (see Elsaesser 2019; Rodowick 2014, 2015).

The first and perhaps most obvious shift – paralleling the shift within cognitive theory itself – is from first-generation, mentalist or 'hard' (computational, top-down) models of cognition to second-generation embodied or 'soft' (contextual, 4E, bottom-up) models, or various synthesising combinations of these approaches. Although theorists such as Bordwell, Currie and Carroll, in their earlier work (from the mid-1980s to the late-1990s), focused on inferential models of perception, strongly 'mentalist' theories of mind, or paid scant attention to the contextual, ecological or embodied and embedded character of cognition,[11] along with a host of other theorists (Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2015; Nannicelli and Taberham 2014; Plantinga 2009a, 2018) they have embraced more expansive and pluralistic forms of cognitivist theory. These tend to emphasise cultural-contextual, ecological, social, embodied, extended and affective-emotional dimensions of cognitive experience. Many of the standard critiques made of cognitivist theory (as I discuss further in Chapter 4), such as reductionism, scientism or the neglect of non-standard (art or 'parametric') forms of narrative film, have been addressed in different ways by contemporary 'soft' cognitivist film theories. This shift has been accompanied by a greater acknowledgment of, and engagement with, phenomenological approaches to film (as I discuss in Chapter 5), emphasising the centrality of sensuous, affective and bodily engagement with cinema, and the essential role played by affective, involuntary, corporeal 'bottom-up' processes in our experience of film. Having broached this experiential dimension of film, however, a more basic ontological question beckons, one to be addressed in the next chapter: what *is* cinema, especially in the digital age?

2

The Rules of the Game: New Ontologies of Film

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Despite its attack on the older paradigm ('Grand Theory'), the new philosophical approaches to film have returned to key questions of classical film theory. The original question that animated much early film theory was the question of film as *art*. Was the new medium of film merely a clever technical gadget, suitable for recording works of artistic performance? Or was it a new artform with its own creative possibilities? With its novel combination of technological, industrial and collaborative production, the medium of cinema challenged traditional concepts of art. The question of film as art has therefore also returned as a topic of debate in contemporary philosophy of film, especially given the erosion of the distinction between high art and popular art, and the profound transformation of our understanding of audiovisual culture brought about by the advent of digital image-making practices. In what follows I consider some of the key problems of the new ontologies of film: the question of how to define the 'medium' of

moving images; the problem of defining 'movement' in moving images; and the return of philosophical debates over film as art. Once again, these questions have gained a renewed urgency and relevance in the past decade thanks to the shift to digital images, which raises the question of whether we can still talk meaningfully about 'film' or need to modify or revise our conceptions of moving images and cinema more generally (see McGregor 2013). Despite the plethora of attempts to 'define' the medium, the ontology of the image or the nature of film as art, cinema seems to resist any such attempts at conceptual definition, or indeed calls for a more pluralistic way of articulating these ontological questions. Indeed, this inherent ambiguity of film reflects its irreducibly hybrid character as a medium that is at once a traditional form of narrative representation and an expression of the freedom of modern aesthetics. This inherent ambiguity has only been heightened or exacerbated by the shift towards digital images, raising the question of ontology of cinema in a renewed, more acute sense.

Ontologies of the Image

The new philosophies of film have returned to investigating some of the classical problems of film theory: the nature of the moving image, the question of film as art, the problem of genre, how to understand narrative, questions of film style and so on. These interconnected lines of inquiry constitute *a new ontology* of the moving image. What distinguishes the moving image from the photographic image? How is film to be distinguished from painting, theatre and photography? Are digital images technological variants of traditional cinematic images or do they constitute an ontologically unique kind of moving image? What is distinctive about the way narrative film works? As we have seen, Noël Carroll has argued against the idea of an 'essentialist' conception of the filmic medium, which medium would provide aesthetic criteria for particular styles of filmmaking (2008: 35–52). Other philosophers, however, have defended modified versions of a 'medium' approach to film, arguing that considerations of the medium remain important ontologically and aesthetically (Gaut 2010: 282–307). As remarked, the advent of digital images and widespread use of CGI in contemporary filmmaking, moreover, have raised anew the traditional questions concerning the ontology of the moving image. Do these technological transformations mean that we need to rethink what we understand by 'film'? Is cinema essentially a form of animation? (see Cholodenko 2008; Manovich 2016;

McGregor 2013). Do we need to discard traditional conceptions of the ontology of film in favour of a renewed account of digital media? For some thinkers, such D. N. Rodowick (2007b), not to mention filmmakers like David Lynch (see 2006: 149–156), the advent of digital film images means that we are witnessing the 'end of film', its transformation into something rich and strange.[1] Not only because of the novel aesthetics of the digital image, its flatness, immediacy and manipulability, or because of the ways in which digital photography breaks the ontological link between image and referent, opening up a digital regime of quasi-animated 'hyperimages' (as readily connectible and synthetic as hypertext). For some theorists, the portability, immediacy, speed and diminished costs of digital video (DV) production promise a re-democratisation of the medium, opening it up to new narratives, filmmakers and otherwise marginalised perspectives. For others, technological transformations in the way moving images are produced or communicated do not warrant such radical claims, although they do demand philosophical reflection on the significance of new forms of digital cinema in relation to analogue forms, and further examination of the ways in which digital images alter how we conceive of cinema as a medium (Gaut 2010: 43–50; Prince 2019).

One of the earliest tasks of film theory was to identify the nature of this new medium, a sign that film theory has always had a philosophical bent. Coupled with this was the cultural demand to defend its artistic value against criticisms that it represented merely a photographic recording of dramatic performances, hence was not an artform in its own right – a view recently rehearsed by Roger Scruton (1981). This perplexing complaint, seemingly consigned to the dustbin of history, nonetheless recurs in subtle form even today, when cinema is relegated to a lowly position, relative to theatre, literature, music and painting, in the hierarchy of the arts. To this end, early film theorists (Münsterberg, Arnheim, Balázs and Kracauer, for example) devoted much energy to arguing the case for the distinctiveness of film, articulating its relative artistic strengths in comparison with photography, painting and theatre. While this is no longer something that film theorists need to defend, questions concerning the ontology of film have returned thanks to the philosophical rethinking of classical film theory. Arthur Danto (1979) and Noël Carroll (2006a), for example, have both offered important contributions to the ontology of the moving image (a category more congenial to the plural character of the image than the more conventional term, 'film'). Interestingly, however, they have abandoned any strong claim to have enumerated necessary and sufficient conditions for defining the moving

image.[2] Their more modest definitions point, rather, to necessary conditions (elements that are necessary for something to count as a moving image), while acknowledging that moving images will continue to evolve, hence that any definition must remain plural and open-ended.

Despite his criticisms of the 'medium essentialism' thesis, Noël Carroll has proffered a definition of the moving image that articulates some of its 'necessary, general features' in relation to other arts (2006a: 113). Taking up Bazin's famous claim concerning the photographic basis of film (1967: 9–16), Carroll challenges the photographic realist approach, a view that has been described (by Scruton (1981) and Walton (1984)) as the 'transparency thesis': the claim that moving images, due to their automatic, photographic recording, are direct presentations (rather than visual re-presentations) of what they depict (Bazin 1967; Scruton 1981; Walton 1984). According to this view, which we will find rehearsed in Cavell's ontology of film, there is an *identity* relation between image and referent; the cinematic image is 'transparent', presenting us with an image of 'the object itself', that is, a direct presentation rather than a representation of it. According to photographic realists, moving images can be seen therefore as akin to prosthetic images – telescopes, microscopes, convex mirrors and the like – that involve an extension or enhancement of our practices of natural perception. We might think here of the remarkable scene in *Blade Runner* (1982) in which Deckard [Harrison Ford] deploys a visual device enabling him to peer around corners *within* a photographic image. On this view, photography and cinematic images are similarly prosthetic devices that give us access to things, persons and events from the past. Such images, moreover, are counterfactually dependent upon their referents; had these referents been different, so too would the images. Had Paulette Goddard been cast as Jean Harrington in *The Lady Eve* (1941), as originally intended, we would not only have been deprived of Barbara Stanwyck's brilliant performance, but would also have an aesthetically quite different work.

A simple objection at this point is to question the photographic basis of contemporary moving images. CGI and digital image technology, for example, throw the identity between image and referent into question because such images are not linked to a referent as their model, and so are a class of images that need not refer to an actual object. Photography does not serve as a constituent element of such images, which are nonetheless included in what we understand by 'film'. Does this mean that cinematic images, especially computer animated ones, are more akin to paintings or drawings than to photographs? This intriguing question recurs in discussions of digital imagery. A traditional distinction that is relevant here is between the *automatism* of film

images (thanks to mechanical recording) and the *intentionalist* character of paintings or drawings (in the sense of including only those elements intended by the artist who created it).[3] Such a contrast immediately raises critical questions. Despite the automatism of film, photographers and cinematographers clearly intend to create certain aesthetic effects, and compose their shots accordingly, including manipulated photographic images. The view that paintings are the expressions of an artist's intentions, on the other hand, flies in the face of the 'automatism' of much modern art (in surrealism, in conceptual art, in pop art, in hybrid installations, in industrially produced works and so on). Whatever the case, Carroll deploys the distinction between film images that are made by means of an automatic recording process involving the camera, and paintings that require deliberation and execution of the work by an artist. There can be unintended elements in a film shot that are recorded inadvertently (in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), a young boy can be seen covering his ears just seconds before a gunshot rings out in the diner on Mount Rushmore). Traditional paintings and drawings, by contrast, include only those elements intended by the artist (a painting that extends beyond its own frame is this way because the artist intended it to be so).

Does this traditional distinction between the automatism of moving images and the intentional character of pictorial depiction capture what is distinctive to each? Carroll's rejoinder to this distinction is intriguing: 'there is no principled difference between film shots and paintings here' (2006a: 122), he argues, since it is still possible to find 'unintended' figures even within a painting (Picasso, for example, claimed to have found the shape or relief outline of a squirrel within one of Braque's paintings). Even if one granted Picasso's claim to have 'found' (rather than simply seen) a squirrel in Braque's painting, it is not clear that this is the same kind of 'unintentional' effect that occurs within a film shot. The point of the contrast, rather, is to show that a typical film shot (involving a recording of profilmic action) may include 'mistakes' occurring during the recording that do not seem possible in the same way for a painting. That Picasso found a 'squirrel-like' shape in Braque's painting may add to its aesthetic interest, or reflect Picasso's lively visual imagination, but it hardly constitutes a 'mistake' like the jumpy boy actor's precautionary ear-blocking in *North by Northwest*. Braque's 'squirrel' exists, insofar as it does, as an accident of form or line more or less discernible on the canvas (thanks to Picasso's lively visual sense), whereas Hitchcock's jumpy extra was an ineliminable element within a recorded scene of live action. To blur the ontological distinction between these two cases – between accidental patterning of form and constituent element of the recorded image

– seems to beg the question against the distinction between film images and paintings.

What of the claim that film images are prosthetic in the way the telescopic, microscopic and other perceptually enhanced images are? Carroll offers an important criticism here that draws on similar arguments made by Arthur Danto (1979) and Francis Sparshott (1975). The difference between 'prosthetic' images and those in a (fictional) film involves the discontinuity between the latter and my own bodily orientation in space. According to Carroll, I can always orient my body towards what the prosthetic image reveals (whether supernova or bacteria), whereas I cannot do so with a film image (say Rick's bar in *Casablanca* (1942) or the film set where these scenes were shot). This is because the latter both remain, 'phenomenologically speaking, disconnected from that space that I live in' (Carroll 2006a: 123). This description, however, is ambiguous and misleading, since the phenomenological space in which I live enfolds the various contexts in which I happen to watch films. The fictional world, however, is ontologically distinct from the space I inhabit in ways that are more marked than, for example, live theatre viewing (because of the 'recorded' and edited character of cinematic performance). At the same time, such phenomenological connection with the space in which I view films is essential to my bodily, perceptual and aesthetic engagement with them (the wrong lighting, seating, noise levels, background features or image size will ruin my experience of the film). Phenomenological orientation within space is a condition of my bodily and perceptual engagement with film, even though we always remain aware of our separation from the cinematic world.

Be that as it may, Carroll, following Sparshott, dubs this feature of cinematic viewing 'alienated vision', claiming that what we see on the cinema screen is a *disembodied view* or 'detached view' that disallows us any bodily or kinaesthetic orientation towards it (2006a: 123). This makes sense in relation to the cinematic character of the world depicted, whether that world be fictional (in movies) or a perspective on the non-fictional world (in documentary). Here again, however, one might question the scope of this claim on phenomenological grounds: it is hard to see, for example, how I can have the kind of bodily visceral responses of fear, panic or nausea to a horror film unless there is some possibility of bodily or kinaesthetic orientation towards the visual display – and what it depicts – before me. The phenomenon of bodily or motor mimicry – where I involuntarily move, gesture, flinch or experience muscular changes in response to a viewed scene – suggests that, at an embodied phenomenological level, there is some version of bodily orientation occurring in relation to elements of the (perceived and imagined)

actions, objects or characters within a cinematic world. Think of the familiar example of the bodily reaching for, or recoiling from, objects moving towards the viewer in 3D movie contexts or extreme POV shots where the spectator occupies the perspective of a protagonist (Smith 1997).

One can take these criticisms further. Using unaided embodied perception as a phenomenological criterion for bodily orientation seems as dubious in the case of microphenomena (bacteria, viruses) or macrophenomena (supernovae) as in the case of an absent space or location (like a film set). It does not make much sense to claim, either way, that I can orient my body towards a flu virus or towards Alpha Centauri. Objects towards which we can take a bodily stance or perceptual orientation tend to be those upon which we would, in principle, be able to act in some way. On the other hand, one can nonetheless imagine orienting one's body towards a film set that is nearby, or doing so while watching a film screening that takes place 'on set'.[4] Matters are complicated by the fact that what we see may no longer exist (the film set, the distant star); how can I orient my body towards past events? Carroll is clearly right to say that I cannot orient my body towards *fictional* persons, places or events. While we generally do not watch narrative films in order to work out how to get to the fictional world in question (but think of *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939)), we can nonetheless orient ourselves imaginatively *in relation* to the diegetic world of the film. In many cases, this involves a distinctively phenomenological sense of bodily-perceptual orientation *within* the world of the film: in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), for example, we quickly orient ourselves in relation to Jeff Jeffries' [James Stewart's] apartment, his neighbours, the facing courtyard and opposing apartment block with its interesting residents.[5] In Demme's *Silence of the Lambs*, (1991), I could not experience the bodily fear and panic that Clarice Starling [Jodie Foster] experiences groping in the dark before a murderous 'Buffalo Bill' [Ted Levine] unless I could orient myself imaginatively (and phenomenologically) within the darkened cellar in which he stalks her wearing night vision goggles.[6] Although I clearly remain disconnected, from the perspective of my body, from any fictional world, I can nonetheless be perceptually, affectively and imaginatively engaged *within* the virtual world that I perceive on the screen.

Moving Images

David Lynch tells the story of contemplating one of his paintings and wondering what it would look like if it could move, a thought that sparked

his remarkable career as a filmmaker (quoted in Rodley 2005: 37). Animation is precisely the giving of movement – or life – to images that would otherwise be still, without life in the sense of self-movement. Here we seem to have an undeniable element belonging to the ontology of the moving image (as distinct from other images or 'still images'). But what does it mean to say that moving images *move*? Are we enjoying merely the illusion of movement? Or do the characters we see on the screen 'really' move? What would distinguish the perception of movement of characters on screen with the perception of actors moving in real life? It would seem peculiar to deny that the movement of a burglar entering a building captured on CCTV cannot serve as reliable evidence of a robbery because the movements of the depicted suspect are not real but illusory. One could say that we are watching a representation of the robbery, not the robbery as such, apparent movements of those represented figures, not real movements of the suspected burglars. This would nonetheless sound odd, even counter-intuitive (and suggest some sophistry on the part of the accused's lawyer).

We know that the impression of movement in moving images is due to combined effects of two psycho-physiological phenomena: the flicker fusion threshold and apparent motion (or the stroboscopic effect). The flicker fusion threshhold (an updated version of the 'persistence of vision' idea) is the point at which a rapid succession of static images is perceived as fused into a continuous image with 'flicker free' movement (slow the rate of image succession and one begins to perceive flickering of the image and a breakdown in one's perception of continuous movement).[7] This fusion effect occurs in tandem with the phenomenon of apparent or stroboscopic motion (which also used to be called the 'phi phenomenon' in Gestalt psychology). It refers to the visual illusion whereby a static object, presented in succession, appears to move (e.g. a circular row of lightbulbs lighting up in succession giving the impression of a 'movement' of the light source in a circular motion). Although the precise manner in which cinematic motion is perceived remains scientifically debated from a neurological standpoint, there is broad consensus that our experience of motion in motion pictures is due to the combined effects of critical flicker fusion and the phenomenon of apparent motion (see Hoerl 2012). There is also strong evidence that the same processes involved in the perception of cinematic motion are also in play in the perception of movement in ordinary experience.

Does this mean that the phenomenon of movement in movies gives us an assured criterion to distinguish moving images from static images in painting or photography? It might seem so, yet one can readily give counterexamples

of films that eschew any movement of, or within, the image. Carroll (2008: 59), for example, provides an impressive list of experimental films, ranging from Nagisa Oshima's *Band of Ninjas* (1967) (a film of a comic strip), Michael Snow's *One Second in Montreal* (1969) (a film of photos), Hollis Frampton's *Poetic Justice* (1972) (a film of a shooting script), to Godard and Gorin's *Letter to Jane* (1972) (another film of photos).

The most famous example, however, is Chris Marker's *La jetée* (1962), a mesmerising reverie and time-travel narrative composed of a series of projected still images, photographs one wants to say, with no movement (bar one) throughout the entire film. As Carroll notes, one could imagine an idealised version of *La jetée* (with no movement at all), and ask the question whether this is a film, a work of cinema or something else. A similar question is posed by Jarman's *Blue* (1993), which presents a film without a moving image or arguably any image at all (in the sense of being an image *of* something, since all that appears on screen is a blue colour field, accompanied by poetic voiceover). If we accept *Blue* as a moving picture, then we have to ask if films need be composed of moving images in the conventional sense. Similarly, if we accept *La jetée* as a work of cinema (indeed a revered and memorable one), then we have to question whether movement need be a necessary condition of film. On other hand, we could question on what grounds we would count *La jetée* as a work of cinema, but not an identical slideshow installation of just these enigmatic photographs telling the story of a lost soul 'haunted by an image'. Or one could approach *Blue* as an artistic audiovisual work that poses the question 'what is film?' in such a way to invite a phenomenological experiential encounter with philosophical significance for both film theory and philosophy of film (see Sobchack 2011).

Carroll's response is to argue that the 'technical possibility' of movement, rather than actual movement, is a necessary element of film. Because we have the reasonable expectation that we *may* see movement at some point (and, of course, we do see one moving shot), we can classify *La jetée* as an unconventional cinematic work. This could never be the case with a slideshow of all the relevant still images screened in a comparable manner (say, an installation in an art gallery consisting of a slideshow of just the images used in Marker's film). Hence the ontology of the moving image does not depend on actual so much as *potential* movement within such images. Agreeing with Arthur Danto (1979), Carroll concludes that it is the technical possibility, hence reasonable expectation, of potential movement that distinguishes the 'moving' image, even if we are confronted by a cinematic work like *La jetée* in which images may not actually move.

A difficulty arises here, however, with Carroll's preferred term for film ('moving images'). For if a film can be a film without having any images that move (*La jetée*), or even any images in the conventional sense (*Blue*), why insist on the term 'moving images' as the proper designation for works of cinema? Admittedly, it would be perverse to cite *La jetée* or *Blue* as paradigmatic cases of cinema, but their anomalous status does raise questions about the ontology of moving images as definitive of cinema as a medium. Indeed, we could also query Carroll's assumption that *La jetée* is 'indisputably a motion picture' (2008: 59). Why so? A number of alternative hypotheses are equally possible. Perhaps *La jetée* shows that our assumptions concerning what is 'indisputably a motion picture' are open to question. Perhaps it is a slideshow masquerading as a work of cinema; perhaps it suggests that, under certain circumstances, slideshows can be construed as films; or that the kind of expectation we bring to our interpretation of images depends upon what we take them to be, even on their context of presentation. Imagine an art gallery photographic slideshow of images from *La jetée* presented by a postmodern artist, perhaps presented as a clever 'remake' of the work that copies it image for image in a slideshow presentation. One might respond quite differently to the slideshow than to a conventional screening of the film version. Imagine that we are in the gallery, and that we share a knowledge of Marker's film; we would now be perplexed as to whether we are seeing a version of 'Marker's film' or a clever 'simulation' of it by means of the slideshow exhibit. What if no discernible physical difference distinguishes my viewing of the slideshow from my viewing of (Carroll's 'ideal' version of) the film? What, ontologically speaking, distinguishes the slideshow version from the film version? Would the means of exhibition, or the material 'medium' being used, or the context of performance, change the meaning of the work? Here it is the context of presentation (a gallery) as well as the viewer's expectation that are important, shaping how the film is 'indexed' as being of such and such a category or kind, rather than any independent ontological features of the images themselves. *La jetée* is thus a paradoxical 'cinematic' work that remains ambiguous between still and moving image, slideshow and motion picture, and thereby challenges us, philosophically and cinematically, to mark and reflect upon the differences that we usually assume to exist between them.

Whatever the case, it is undeniable that movement, in most cases, describes what moving images typically show. Is this movement, however, real or illusory? Is it an apparent movement due to the animating effect of perceiving related images in rapid succession? Or is it, rather, a 'real' movement that we perceive when we watch movies? This question was

addressed in classical film theory, with Münsterberg and Arnheim both arguing that the movement we observe is apparent movement that arises as an effect of the psychological and cognitive operations of our own minds (Münsterberg 2002 [1916]: 69–71). Münsterberg and Arnheim both make the familiar phenomenological point that, while we are aware that we are watching 'flat' two-dimensional images, we nonetheless *experience* the impression of depth and movement on the screen (Münsterberg 2002 [1916]: 71; Arnheim 1957: 20). They take the further idealist step, however, of imputing this experience to our 'inner mental activity' uniting separate phases of movement in the 'idea of connected action' (Münsterberg 2002 [1916]: 78).[8] Depth and movement on the screen, according to this view, are a mixture of 'objective' perception, varieties of perceptual illusion, and the subjective construal of this 'mixed' mode of perception, which we do not even notice once perceptually and psychologically immersed in the complex visual world of the film.

Henri Bergson offered (back in 1907) one of the paradigmatic criticisms of the illusory character of the movement we perceive in cinematographic images. Because the appearance of movement in moving images depends upon the projection of a series of static images at a rapid rate of succession (through a projector), cinematic images can only ever deliver the 'illusion' of movement based upon the animation of a series of static poses. Bergson even argued that ordinary perception and consciousness also operate according to the 'cinematographic illusion', composing apparent movement out of the synthesis of successive static images (2005: 251–252). It is fair to say that this account of the illusory character of cinematic motion – that it involves apparent motion generated by the animation of static images – has remained the dominant view in much film theory, although it has recently been challenged by a number of contemporary philosophers (such as Deleuze (1986), Currie (1995) and Carroll (2008)). As Deleuze argues, Bergson's error was to assume that, because moving images were composed of a succession of static images, the movement they depicted could only ever be illusory (1986: 2). This is to confuse, however, the mechanical genesis of moving images with the experience of what they depict (movement). Movement-images give a direct presentation of movement, even though the process by which they are generated involves the animation of static images and the phenomenon of apparent motion.

Deleuze's criticism is elaborated by Currie and Carroll, who both agree that, although our impression of movement depends upon static images, we can still hold that the moving image really does move for us (see Currie 1995, 1996; Carroll 2008: 87–93). This is not to say that we need assert that this movement

is 'real' in some deep metaphysical sense. Rather, it means that the movement perceived in moving images is 'objective' in the sense of being intersubjectively verifiable by other observers, hence that we need not accept that the movement we perceive is merely illusory or somehow 'subjective' (Carroll 2008: 88).[9] Both Currie and Carroll draw the analogy with colour perception: even though the colours we ordinarily perceive are merely apparent (dependent upon our capacity for vision as much as the wavelengths of light reflected from particular surfaces), this does not mean that they are 'illusory' (otherwise how could we distinguish genuine colour illusions such as colour blindness?). In the same way that we take colours to be real but response-dependent properties (intersubjectively perceived, under normal conditions, by other human subjects), we should also take movement to be a real but response-dependent property of moving images (Carroll 2008: 89–93).

Hoerl (2012) makes a further argument. Compared with apparent motion, which can be phenomenologically distinguished from real motion (I am aware that the lightbulb does not 'really' move in a circular arrangement of lightbulbs but only appears to do so), we do not experience this phenomenological difference between real and apparent motion in the case of moving images and respond to both in the same manner. When I see a character walking or laughing on screen, this is not phenomenologically distinguishable as 'apparent' walking or laughing compared with ordinary experience, even though we remain aware that we are seeing cinematic motion rather than real motion (that is, a cinematic image rather than natural perception). From this point of view, 'movies' are precisely what we see on screen.

The argument over movement in the movies is polarised between critics who point to the way movement is generated by 'illusory' means, and defenders who argue that the onus is on critics to explain why we should not accept that the movement we perceive on screen is 'real' movement. Part of the issue here, I suggest, is a conflation of phenomenological and causal levels of explanation. Critics argue that, because the causal process involved in generating moving images involves the perceived fusion of static images, the movement can only be illusory. Defenders claim that we need not posit any metaphysical kind of reality to the movement we perceive since it is experienced, in a subjective or response-dependent way, like any other movement we perceive in ordinary experience.

A way out of the impasse is to clarify that we *do* perceive movement on the screen (within an image, between images, unfolding in time), from a phenomenological point of view. There is nothing substantial in the phenomenal experience of movement in a cinematic image to distinguish it from movement

perceived by the unaided eye. Objects and spatial relations may appear 'flatter' (e.g. watching a race cyclist on television riding up a steep hill), due to the two-dimensional nature of the image, but the movements themselves (the pedal strokes, muscular leg efforts and movement of the bicycle) do not appear to be discernibly different. We can even consult movement presented in cinematic images in cases where our perception is doubtful or deceived (consider the use of slow-motion footage of a closely fought running or cycling race, or visual tracking and trajectory simulation technology in television sporting coverage of cricket and tennis). There is no reason to question the phenomenological reality of such movement perceived, since it accords with the kinds of experiences of movement in ordinary perception. Indeed, the movies rely on such emulation (and manipulation) of natural perception in all sorts of ways (and it is why we do not need to absorb elaborate cultural codes in order to perceive and understand movement in movies).

To make a familiar phenomenological point, theoretical questions concerning the ontological status of movement in the moving image can arise only once we (consciously or deliberately) interrupt the immersive experience of watching a movie and reflect on the mechanisms or processes – be they technological, psychological or physiological – that causally generate the movement we perceive.[10] Rather than questioning our phenomenological experience, we need only distinguish what we might call the primacy of cinematic perception – what we experience, phenomenologically, when we watch movies – from the theoretical or explanatory accounts of the various causal mechanisms that generate this phenomenological experience of movement in time. Our phenomenological and aesthetic experience of movement is a perceptible expression, rather than illusory distortion, of the causal mechanisms generating what we perceive on screen (see Merleau-Ponty 1964: 54–59).

Film as Art Redux

Another striking feature of contemporary philosophy of film is its renewed interest in the question of film as *art*, a question traditionally tied with the ontology of film. Münsterberg's *The Photoplay* (2002 [1916]) and Arnheim's *Film as Art* (1957 [1930]) inaugurated the tradition of commencing theoretical reflection on film by addressing the aesthetic and ontological question concerning film as art. Like Arnheim, Münsterberg argued that film ('the photoplay') is an artform distinct from theatre and photography, yet aesthetically superior in having become (artistically) freed from the constraints of space and

time (2002: 129).[11] Anticipating a line of inquiry that continues today, Münsterberg and Arnheim argued that film artistically transforms, rather than merely passively records, dramatic performance and visual display. Far from simply recording interesting objects or events (like the early cinematic *actualités* depicting everyday scenes) or dramatic performances (like the earliest narrative films), cinema gives artistic expression to how things, events, performances are depicted. In doing so, moreover, cinema can emulate psychological acts of consciousness (perception, attention, imagination, recollection), thus suggesting an intriguing film/mind analogy that has continued to fascinate theorists of film from Münsterberg and Jean Mitry to cognitivist philosophers of film.[12]

The questions that animated early film theory were at once technological and aesthetic, ontological and evaluative. What was the nature of this new medium? Was it an artform akin to photography or theatre, or something with its own artistic possibilities? Early reflection on film as art underlined not only its technological character but also its cultural legitimacy. Given the clash between technical and evaluative issues, however, it was paramount to establish the nature of the new medium. Cinema emerged out of experiments with animation that attempted to create the image of movement through the rapid projection of successive images (late-19th century devices such as the zoetrope, praxinoscope and kinetoscope). Film was subjected, however, to the same sceptical arguments that had been made against photography as an art. The new artform was derided by some critics for simply mechanically recording actions and events, and hence as lacking the deliberate skill and expressive power required for art (see Arnheim 1957: 8–9). Early theorists thus developed a defence of film as not merely recording but as *artistically transforming* our perception of reality. It was but a short step to ally the filmmaker, typically the director, with the author of a work whose artistic vision, thematic concerns and aesthetic style comprise an oeuvre belonging to what was later baptised the cinematic *auteur*.

The debate here concerns the contrast between the medium of film construed as a technical recording of an artistic performance (and so not an artform in its own right) and film as expression of an artistic point of view, using compositional and stylistic devices to evoke aesthetic meaning (and so an artform expressing artistic intentions on the part of an artist). This debate crystallised the polarity between *realist* (film captures reality thanks to its mechanical recording of images) and *expressivist* positions (film expresses subjective states and the artistic intentions of a director) regarding the medium of film. Indeed, this intersection between ontological and aesthetic concerns – does the medium of film shape its artistic possibilities? – continues

to play a role in contemporary philosophical debates (for contrasting views see Carroll 2006a and Gaut 2010). The most striking instance of such a return to the question of film as art is Roger Scruton's revisionist critique of both photography and film as presentational, hence not artistic, mediums (1981).[13]

Perhaps because of its counter-intuitive character, Scruton's critique of the idea of film as an independent artform has generated a host of critical responses (see Abell 2010; Gaut 2002; McIver Lopes 2005). For all its impact, however, Scruton's critique rehearses arguments that were prevalent in the early days of film theory. Indeed, Scruton begins, in the traditional manner, with an investigation of the question of photography and representation (1981: 578–581). Contra most conventional accounts, Scruton claims that photography, due to its mechanical nature, cannot be regarded as representational (it simply records or shows us the subject, not how the photographer regards the subject). Paintings, on the other hand, *are* representational, since they are intentional artefacts that reflect how the artist intended to portray something: a painting displays only those elements an artist intended to portray; a photograph, as a recording of its subject, displays unintentional elements that bear no relation to the photographer's artistic intentions (Scruton 1981: 578–584). Assuming one accepts this strongly intentionalist account of art (about which one can raise doubts), Scruton goes on to distinguish painting as a representational art from photography as a presentational recording of reality. On this view, Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642) is a work of art, whereas Peter Greenaway's *Nightwatching* (2007), a complex cinematic reflection on Rembrandt's painting, is not!

Scruton then extends this critique, arguing that film, as dependent upon photographic recording of its subjects, similarly fails to qualify as a representational art. Rather, a 'film is a photograph of a dramatic representation' (Scruton 1981: 598). Scruton concludes that the common assertion that there are cinematic masterpieces rests on a confusion between dramatic art and its photographic recording: 'It follows that if there is such a thing as a cinematic masterpiece it will be so because – like *Wild Strawberries* and *Le règle de jeu* – it is in the first place a dramatic masterpiece' (1981: 577).

Again echoing criticisms from the early days of film theory, Scruton goes further in his attack on the aesthetic status of film, arguing that its unintentional recording of a plethora of extraneous detail and unfocused jumble of visual information detracts from the aesthetic form of the image and is apt to confuse the unfortunate filmgoer (1981: 599–600). Indeed, our aesthetic interest in film, Scruton claims, concerns only its subject; we cannot take an aesthetic interest in it as such because it is essentially a photographic recording, rather than an aesthetic representation, of a performance.

Repeating a pattern that has unfortunately become rather familiar, in this kind of prescriptive critique the philosopher feels little need to acknowledge the rich history of theorisation over precisely the question of film (or photography) as art. The idea that there might be philosophical film criticism – or even specific claims and arguments within the history of film theory (Arnheim, for example) – that argues precisely for the artistic achievement of film (or photography) barely rates a mention.

In any event, Scruton's critics have rehearsed sophisticated defences of film as art using arguments that go back to Münsterberg and Arnheim. As Katherine Thomson-Jones points out, one can either challenge Scruton's claim that photography cannot be an artform in its own right, or one can challenge Scruton's extension of his claims concerning photography to cinema, arguing that film has its own distinctive aesthetic possibilities (2008: 8–9). Another strategy is to argue that Scruton is simply wrong in construing cinema as a photographic, that is, non-representational, art, either because his account of photographic art is implausible (McIver Lopes 2005), or because his account of cinema as non-representational is untenable (Abell 2010). From an aesthetic point of view, the burden of proof, one might argue, falls on the sceptic who claims that we cannot entertain a genuine aesthetic interest in photographs (and by extension films), but are merely satisfying our intellectual curiosity while mistakenly believing that we are enjoying art. As we shall see, this depends, of course, on what we understand by 'art', indeed what kind of aesthetic theory of the work of art we entertain (for example, that art is the object of a disinterested aesthetic pleasure; or an expression of cultural-historical meaning; or a unity of significant form; or whatever the relevant art institutions of the day count as belonging to the 'artworld' and so on). Suffice to say that these are deeply contested aesthetic questions. Although Scruton refines Bazin's claims concerning the photographic character of film, it is ironic that the aesthetic conclusions Scruton draws are quite opposed to those that inspired Bazin.

Back to the Future: Bazin and Arnheim on Film as Art

Contemporary critics of Scruton repeat more sophisticated versions of the defence of film as art that began with Münsterberg and Arnheim. Such critics argue either that photography is a representational art that can sustain

aesthetic interest and involves a variety of intentional artistic effects, or that the extension of claims made concerning photography cannot be extrapolated to film, since film is a distinctive representational art with its own aesthetic potentials that contribute to its artistic significance.

Alexander Sesonske, for example, argues that the aesthetics of film can be articulated via the affordances of the medium itself: film has its own ways of representing space, time and movement that are novel in relation to the other arts, as are the ways of experiencing space, time and movement that film affords us as viewers (1974: 53–55). Film offers a way of representing and of experiencing space as two-dimensional, yet as creating the impression of depth in which action and movement can occur. It reveals a new way of representing time, both within the world of the film as for the viewers who experience a complex narrative spanning different times and places all within a 'real time' cinematic viewing timespan of one to two hours. It represents a new way of framing and depicting movement that incorporates natural perception as much as the complex artistry of camera movement, framing and montage, sound and music, with rhythms of movement and shot sequencing that can both heighten meaning as well as intensify our affective responsiveness. All of these novelties of representation and aesthetic experience are characteristic of cinema as an artform, one that partakes of all the rest, yet has its own unique possibilities of aesthetic expression. As Carroll remarks, the main service performed by Scruton's arguments against film as art is, ironically, to help focus, clarify and articulate our reasons for defending film's aesthetic significance.

An alternative position that has emerged in recent years involves an uncoupling of ontological and aesthetic questions. The ontology of film, according to Carroll, does not have normative implications concerning aesthetic questions of film as art, or at best, it leaves open the question of the aesthetic uses to which the (pluralistic) medium of film can be put. To say it differently, one cannot always get an aesthetic 'ought' from an artistic 'is'. For all the sophistication of the philosophical debate, however, what we might call the *aesthetic question* still persists: granted that film is a (mass) art, what is it that qualifies a particular film as art? Philosophers of film, when they acknowledge this question, tend to respond by presenting a theory of film as art or by invoking criteria of aesthetic evaluation. Carroll, for example, argues that we should remotivate a traditional (Aristotelian) categorical approach that would distinguish differing genres and styles, each with their own aesthetic qualities and excellences (2008: 192–225). Such an approach, with its laudable emphasis on pluralism, nonetheless raises the question of the way in which we should decide the relevant criteria of aesthetic evaluation: what are the criteria for

choosing our aesthetic criteria, especially when it comes to particular genres? This question is complicated further by the technological-industrial character of film. Even if we refrain from drawing normative conclusions from the physical or technical aspects of the medium, the technical, collective, commercial and cultural-ideological dimensions of film still present filmmaker, critic and audience with a unique set of aesthetic questions and challenges.

Part of the problem, I suggest, is that the aesthetic criteria we use either derive from 'the medium' or from our shared horizon of cultural practices; and here we find both a plurality of criteria and a plurality of ways in which film can be understood. As Jacques Rancière argues (2004: 20–30; 2006: 1–19), film is a hybrid artform that cuts across the three main historical regimes of art: 1) the *ethical* regime (going back to Plato), which grasps images in regard to their truth content and the ethical uses to which they are put. 2) The *representational-poetic* regime (emerging with Aristotle's poetics), which grasps images in terms of their representational character and the ways in which they are composed into narrative forms. And 3), the *aesthetic regime* (Kant and beyond), which links the autonomy of art with the theme of freedom, sunders the link between hierarchies of representation and social hierarchies, and posits an 'egalitarianism' of subject-matter and plurality of aesthetic forms (Rancière 2004: 20–30). From this point of view, film belongs principally to the modern *aesthetic* regime of art; it introduces an ontological egalitarianism (all objects are ontologically 'equal' from the viewpoint of the cinematic image) and an aesthetic pluralism that philosophers have linked to film's inherently democratic potentials (see Cavell 1979: 35). Film shares the freedom of aesthetic art, the 'premodern' concern with the ethical use of images and the representational conventions of narrative fiction. This is why arguments over the ontology of the moving image and the question of the aesthetics of film remain so intractable: film is inherently plural, hybrid, with myriad, sometimes conflicting, aesthetic possibilities. The question of what makes particular films works of art, moreover, is best addressed by way of aesthetically responsive philosophical film criticism. I shall return to this issue in later chapters dealing with particular films as offering cases of 'film as philosophy'.

The Challenge of the Digital

In approaching the ontology of cinema, philosophical film theory has focused overwhelmingly on traditional celluloid-based film. From Bazin and Eisenstein to Cavell and Deleuze, 'film' has meant analogue motion pictures

photographically captured by a camera, using reflected light to photochemically alter light-sensitive salts on celluloid film stock, which is then developed, manually edited and screened in a public venue via a projector. Until recent decades, this was the practical, historical and technological basis for the shared consensus over the meaning of 'film' – a shorthand term covering both the medium and the works produced within it. Since the emergence of video and advent of digital images and media, however, as well as new viewing platforms and practices no longer confined to the movie theatre, the very meaning of the term 'film' has come under question.

On the one hand, some philosophers of film, for example Deleuze and Carroll, were aware of the profound implications of the shift to digital images. In the 1980s, Deleuze noted the emergence of new kinds of images based on digital information interfaces (1989: 265)[14] and pointed to the importance of the brain sciences for understanding cinema (2000: 366).[15] Carroll, for his part, forecast in the 1990s that digital images may well replace photographically based analogue images, adding further weight to his arguments against any putative 'medium essentialism' pertaining to film. On the other hand, as Berys Gaut (2010) and Rafe McGregor (2013), point out, the overwhelming majority of theoretical contributions to the philosophical study of film focus on traditional analogue or photographically based versions of the cinematic medium, leaving in abeyance the philosophical and cultural implications of digital media.[16]

With the shift from analogue to digital all but complete (encompassing not only the recording and editing but also distribution, screening and reception of moving image culture, which now includes television, streaming services, mobile platforms and computer gaming), further reflection on the ontological and aesthetic challenges raised by digital images is timely and apposite. For it is not only the question of how the ontology of cinema is challenged, displaced or transformed by the advent of digital culture but whether we are talking about a transformation of cinema as a hybrid assemblage of mediums or about an ontologically distinct form of image regime altogether. I shall suggest the former account is a more plausible position than the latter (see Prince 2019), which assumes the very materialist form of medium essentialism that the shift to digital image culture throws into question.

What Are Digital Images?

Although they are a ubiquitous feature of contemporary culture, the manner in which digital images are produced is not always well understood. Like analogue

photographic images, digital photographic images depend upon contact with reflected light: light captured by a CCD (charge-coupled device) converts light intensities into electric voltages and then into streams of binary numbers, which are stored as binary-coded bits of information pertaining to dot-point light values (pixels). This mathematical information, stored in the form of a bitmap, can be processed algorithmically (according to prescribed input-output rules) in order to construct a mathematical model that can be represented as a digital image. Such images are constituted via pixels that instantiate particular values pertaining to light, colour, saturation, texture and so on, all of which values can be subjected to further variation or alteration via editing and post-production processes (see McGregor 2013). Whereas an analogue image involves a process of photochemical 'inscription' of the image in a manner that remains isomorphic or mimetic with respect to its profilmic object (hence an 'analogical' image), a digital photographic image offers an informationally based mathematical model of the object (hence a 'digital' image) that no longer has a direct causal link with its referent. It is less a *representation* of a pre-existing object than a *simulation* of it; and the elements of that model are in principle open to variation (or manipulation) such that the 'evidentiary' or referential function of the digital photographic becomes open to question.

Indeed, it is also possible to construct digital images without any reference to a pre-existing photographed object: hand-drawn, computer-generated or software-composed images can be constructed that are essentially animated works (e.g. using CGI software) or that involve a hybridised synthesis of both live-action and CGI-animated footage (as has become commonplace in mainstream action, fantasy and blockbuster movies). It is clear, therefore, that it is no longer possible to use, without qualification, arguments predicated on the photographic basis of analogue film images to understand digital photographic images, let alone digital image media more generally that involve processes spanning the spectrum of analogue photographic capture and computerised animation processes. As we shall see, this raises interesting questions concerning the ontology of moving images, as well as the meaning of any putative 'medium' defining what has historically and culturally been known as 'cinema'.

These stark differences between analogue and digital images have led a number of film and media theorists to argue that digital media represent a radical break with traditional conceptions of the film medium, hence we require a new ontology of moving images. W. J. T. Mitchell, for example, argues that digital images are an entirely distinctive form compared with analogue images, stating that they do not have a photographic basis in the way that

analogue film images do (1992). He goes so far as to claim that we should not describe digital photographs as 'photographs' since they do not share the same properties as analogue photographic images and are more akin to paintings. Lev Manovich (2016: 29) identifies digital images as 'a particular case of animated image that uses live-action footage as one of its many elements', thereby reversing the hierarchy between photographic realism and animated drawing: cinema is closer to the graphic art of animation than the representational character of traditional (analogue) photography. Indeed, there are grounds for considering contemporary digital cinema as returning to cinema's roots in animation, rather than neglecting animation as a minor offshoot of (live action) cinema proper (see also Cholodenko 2008). The widespread use of CGI technology in conjunction with other post-production techniques (compositing digital animation and so on), means that contemporary cinema is a hybrid artform that should be understood in conjunction with animation as key forms of moving image media.

Rafe McGregor follows this strong account of the difference between analogue and digital images, holding to Gaut's 'melange' or hybrid account (2010) of moving images as a wider, more appropriate category than 'film' or even 'moving images', if the latter are confined to mechanically generated images (as is the case with Carroll). He argues that Gaut's 'synthetic' or hybrid view of moving images is the most appropriate for understanding contemporary cinema but also for recognising that cinema, now in its digital form, is the latest manifestation of the art of moving images that goes back millennia. Cinema is the art of moving images, encompassing photochemically based analogue images and digital photographic images but also other forms of moving image. These can include object-generated (Indonesian and Chinese shadow puppet plays), handmade (flip-books, magic lanterns, the phenatakistocope and the praxinoscope) or mechanically generated moving images (including Edison's kinetoscope, the Lumiere brothers' *cinematographe*, which both used film stock, and 'subsequent electronic and digital developments') (McGregor, 2013: 266). This is a more capacious account of moving images, which comprises all three modes of generation (object, handmade or mechanical), while recognising the specificities of digital photography and digital images more generally.

As McGregor points out, Carroll's more restricted account of moving images is confined to mechanical-generated images but excludes object-generated images (shadow puppet plays and the like) without good justification (they are still 'moving images', even if object-generated, and even if they are not what we typically understand by the term 'moving image'). To be sure, there are important ontological differences between analogue and

digital images (analogue images are causally linked to their objects, whereas computer-generated digital images generally are not; digital images are generated by mathematical representation rather than photochemical reproduction; digital photographic images are vastly more manipulable than analogue photographic images and so on). Both belong, however, to the broader category of 'moving images', which we can still regard as constituting the medium of *cinema*, while remaining mindful of the fact that cinema today is a *hybrid digital medium* encompassing live action footage, motion capture, animation, CGI, post-production effects and so on.

As Gaut remarks, the best way of categorising the digital images is therefore as 'a melange (or blended) image – that is, it can be produced by any of the three distinct techniques and each technique may vary in proportion it has in the making of a particular image' (Gaut 2010: 45). The manipulability of the digital image extends right through the production process (including variations in digital capture during recording), editing and post-production processes, which allow the digital image to be edited, recomposited, animated and manipulated in myriad ways, seamlessly combining, for example, live-action with motion-capture animation and CGI technology. As remarked, the manipulability of the digital image has led theorists like Mitchell to argue that digital images should not be called photographs, even if captured on a digital camera, since they are closer to paintings than traditional photography (1992: 3; quoted in McGregor 2013: 270). As Gaut argues, however, both traditional and digital photography employ similar generative techniques and serve similar artistic ends, hence legitimately can be regarded as distinctive kinds of photograph (Gaut 2010: 49). We can say the same of digital cinema, which, despite its ontological difference from traditional film, still employs related generative methods and has been integrated into canonical narrative film genres and styles, while extending and blending these with other digital media (gaming, for example). It is the static nature of photography, rather, which marks an ontological difference in relation to moving images (which are also temporal), not whether these are analogue or digital photographs.

Image Scepticism and Claims to Veracity

One of the most notable debates surrounding the implications of the shift to digital images in cinema, and the shift to digital media image culture more

generally, involves what we might call an 'image scepticism' (or iconoscepticism) that accompanies many accounts of the ontology of digital images. As opposed to 'indexical' accounts of traditional cinema, with their emphasis on the photographic realism of photography and, by extension, the capacity of cinema to capture reality, many contemporary accounts of digital cinema adopt a sceptical stance towards any form of realism or the capacity of (digital) images to capture or represent what we used to call pro-filmic reality. The severing of the ontological or causal link between image and referent, coupled with the manipulability of the digital image at all stages of production, editing and post-production, has resulted in the questioning or even abandonment of claims to realism and a pervasive image scepticism concerning the veracity of moving images. Much like earlier debates concerning documentary film, particularly the influential critique of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema, today's theorists of digital media culture counsel a sceptical view of image culture and reject claims to truth, objectivity or veracity, as ideological relics of an outmoded medium ontology. Given the ideological reworking of this image scepticism, now promulgated as part of the pervasive scepticism towards news media and audiovisual culture more generally (the rise of 'fake news', circulation of deepfakes and so on), it behooves us to consider some of the arguments presented in favour of this image scepticism, and to offer some critical reflections on their scope and limits.

McGregor, for example, casts doubt on what Currie called the 'presentation thesis' with regard to analogue photographs (that such photographs present, rather than represent, reality). As discussed previously, the presentation thesis – exemplified by Walton's 'transparency thesis' – has four aspects: that such photographs display objectivity with respect to their objects; that they photochemically reproduce their object; that are therefore causally related to their objects; and that they are in an important sense 'transparent' in relation to their objects, hence are 'presentations' rather than 'representations'. As part of his refutation, McGregor criticises claims that photojournalism and crime scene photography, for example, 'typically present reality', arguing that this is not always the case (2013: 269–270). He cites famous examples (used by Walton) such as Timothy H. O'Sullivan's photograph, 'Death on a Misty Morning' (1863),[17] a famous image of fallen soldiers during the American Civil War, but where O'Sullivan reportedly moved the corpses in order to create a more dramatic visual effect (expressing a certain artistic but also moral intention in depicting the pathos and suffering of war). McGregor concludes that this, along with other famous cases of 'manipulated' photojournalism, shows that 'even photojournalistic images do not

necessarily present reality', and hence that 'there is room for doubt as to the reality, and room for expression on the part of the photographer' (2013: 269).

These examples, however, only show that photojournalistic images can be manipulated; that they do not necessarily provide a 'transparent' (or truthful/accurate) depiction of reality but rather a mediated representation of it. The possibility of alteration leading to misrepresentation or even distortion of a profilmic state of affairs, however, is parasitic on the possibility of a truthful or veracious representation of this state of affairs (otherwise we would have no grounds for calling it 'manipulated', 'misleading' or a 'misrepresentation'). Manipulation of the image is dependent on its recording capacity and the manner in which both the profilmic objects can be altered or modified (posed), as well as the manner in which the image itself can be manipulated *post-factum*, which, as Tom Gunning points out, has accompanied the history of photography since its inception (Gunning 2008). Such images do not 'present reality' in any unmediated purity, but do so in a (humanly) mediated or 'impure' manner. This does not mean that reality cannot be captured but rather that any image – like any representation – remains open to the possibility of manipulation or distortion, but also that any representation of reality is mediated in myriad ways.

McGregor questions the veracity of such images, and this is indeed important; but the fact that there is 'room to doubt' the veracity of photojournalistic (or indeed any photographic) images does not mean that we need doubt the 'reality' of what is depicted as such (such as the bodies of the fallen soldiers). As McGregor remarks, this shows that photographic images are *representational*, rather than presentational; but their representational character does not mean that they can have no purchase on reality or make claims to *veracity* that may be fallible or unreliable. Citing famous photographic hoaxes – 'like the Cottingly Fairies (1917) and the surgeon's photograph of the Loch Ness monster (1934)' (McGregor 2013: 270) – again shows that such images are manipulable, subject to distortion or deception, rather than that they can make no (mediated) claim to reality as such. Photographic hoaxes (like fake documentaries) are, once again, parasitic on the possibility of veracious images (otherwise the distinction between hoax and non-hoax images would collapse); hence they do not refute claims to reality *tout court* (any more than the existence of 'fake news' refutes the idea of journalistic objectivity or truthful media reporting). Digital images do challenge the claims to veracity that typically accompanied analogue photography; but they do so by increasing the possibilities of alteration, modification, reconfiguration and manipulation to which such images are

subject, thereby underlining the complexity and fallibility (rather than impossibility) of any claims to veracity that we might entertain with regard to such images.

Digital cinema is a novel and innovative technological outgrowth of traditional analogue cinema; despite its distinctive features, however, it is not a fundamentally different medium or artform altogether (Prince 2019). As with the introduction of recorded synch sound, technological transformations in the medium have corresponding artistic effects and open up new possibilities for creative development of the medium. Digital cinema is no different, and it is striking how seamlessly the new digital media technologies have been taken up into 'mainstream' filmmaking practices. Claims regarding the ontological gulf between analogue and digital images have been exaggerated, as have the forms of image scepticism accompanying such claims (the idea that, with the attenuation or severing of the causal link between image and object or referent, digital image regimes mean the abandonment of all claims to veracity, truth, objectivity or realism in cinema). Cinema has always been a hybrid medium playing on both its realist and expressive, direct and constructed dimensions, offering in both fictional and non-fictional modalities a 'creative treatment of actuality' (to paraphrase Grier's famous dictum). Conventional or canonical narrative cinema still overwhelmingly dominates cinematic production, and cinema is still predominantly a narrative artform that presents fictional dramas combining realism and expressivism, fantasy and factuality, subjectivity and objectivity, in myriad artful combinations. Digital image-making practices, as Gaut (2010) and McGregor (2013) point out, have increased the artistic possibilities of the cinematic medium, while raising the question of how we are to understand and interpret such images given their complex, mediated and manipulable claims to veracity.[18]

3

Adaptation: Philosophical Approaches to Narrative

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In my previous chapter, I discussed the renaissance of classical questions of film theory within the new philosophies of film, in particular the question of film as art and the ontology of the moving image. I also addressed some of the implications of the shift to digital images and subsequent transformation of the medium of cinema, which is now best understood as a hybrid form combining traditional analogue and digital media production techniques and visual styles. Other elements of classical film theory that have been renewed within contemporary philosophy of film include narrative, character and the concept of 'identification' – a shorthand term referring to our psychological and emotional engagement with film. Here again analytic-cognitivist philosophers have sharply criticised the theoretical models developed within the previous

paradigm of film theory (structuralist and semiotic theories of narrative, psychoanalytic theories of identification and so on). Theorists like Bordwell, Carroll, Wilson and Gaut have proposed alternative accounts of narrative, character and emotional engagement that draw on debates in analytic aesthetics, philosophy of literature and cognitivist psychology. What post-Theory theorists generally dismiss or ignore, on the other hand, is the Critical Theory-inspired claim that popular film narratives are also vehicles of ideological manipulation. Whatever the case, a host of contemporary film theorists have developed complex theories of narrative, character engagement and affective responsiveness to film (Bordwell 1985; Branigan 1992; Buckland 2009; Elsaesser and Buckland 2002; Gaut 2004; Smith 1995; Tan 2011; Wilson 1986, 1997). Far from being a neglected area in film theory, narrative studies have been flourishing in recent decades, with philosophical theories of narrative adding a significant contribution to current debate (see Chatman 1990).

In this chapter, I shall consider some of the most significant recent philosophical contributions to theorising narrative film, canvassing topics such as the differences between literary and cinematic narrative, the significance of plot, story and style, the problem of cinematic authorship, and the vexed question of whether films have narrators – more specifically an 'implied narrator' as the agent responsible for the images comprising the narrative. I shall focus on Bordwell's and Carroll's highly influential problem-solving or question-and-answer models, which hold that film narrative activates the same cognitive capacities for perceptual engagement, making inferences, testing hypotheses and drawing conclusions as we use in ordinary experience. In conclusion I shall also discuss briefly the important issues and questions raised by the emergence of interactive audiovisual narrative forms such as computer gaming and experimental forms of cinema and television (my focus in Chapter 12 on *Black Mirror*). The question I shall consider is whether such cognitivist theories have an overly intellectualist view of narrative engagement. Does the close analysis of the mechanisms of narrative understanding (and of emotional and affective engagement) do justice to the aesthetic dimension of narrative film? Or can we use the conceptual and theoretical tools of cognitivist theory and contemporary aesthetics to meet the aesthetic challenges of contemporary audiovisual media?

Plot, Story and Style

Although movies are among the most accessible of narrative artforms, the cognitive tasks of understanding, interpreting and evaluating them are far

from simple. As Metz famously quipped, '[a] film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand' (1974: 69). The intuitive obviousness of narrative film is what makes it puzzling and perplexing. There is our perceptual engagement with the image, which relies on the same cognitive operations as ordinary, 'untutored' perception. The images we perceive in a film, however, are linked in an orderly sequence depicting a meaningful series of interconnected events. Despite some notable exceptions (the early cinema of attractions, experimental and modernist art film), movies have remained overwhelmingly narrative-driven. In the simplest terms, narrative refers to the temporally and/or causally ordered representation of meaningful actions and events, presented from particular points of view, within an overarching structure with an intelligible meaning. In this respect, narrative is a very general phenomenon, found in fictional works (novels, plays, films) but also non-fictional ones (journalism, documentaries, scientific investigations and historical accounts). For these reasons, we need to ask what distinguishes narrative film from other narrative forms and to investigate how it works.

Here David Bordwell's deployment of the Russian formalist distinction between *plot* [*syuzhet*] and *story* [*fabula*] has proven very useful (1985: 49–53). The *plot* refers to the ordered structure of what is (visually or linguistically) narrated. It is literally what we see on screen, a selection of images composed in a certain sequential order. The *story*, on the other hand, is the narration (the telling or showing) of what happens chronologically, which viewers understand by reconstructing an account of events from the visual and narrative cues composing the plot. On Bordwell's view, viewers are therefore active participants in the construction of narrative, whereas plot and style are 'objective' features that can be identified via aesthetic and historical critical analysis. Viewers frame their interpretation of the narrative from the visual and narrative elements comprising the plot, applying various culturally and historically acquired interpretative schemata (familiarity with narrative patterns, historically shaped forms of style, relevant genres, traditions, tropes and so on). Individual viewers may draw different inferences, hence hold different versions of the story, depending on which interpretative schema he or she has applied to the plot. On the other hand, we can also have formal film criticism that conforms to norms of interpretation, focusing on formal generic elements, relevant historical context, a filmmaker's development, generic features, comparisons between relevant works, hermeneutic insights derived from the skilled use of interpretative heuristics and so on. To this duality, Bordwell also adds cinematic 'style': the historical evolution of norms and cinematic techniques used to order and structure (that is, to plot) the manner in which the story is narrated (for

example, the use of certain camera angles, point of view, lighting, editing, montage, *mise-en-scène*, performance, production techniques and so on). Style, which is how plot is articulated, can also be the object of formal analysis from an historical point of view, according to which we discern and comprehend style by testing its elements and techniques against already familiar, 'classical' norms (Bordwell's 'historical poetics' (see 1985, 1998b).

To take a familiar example, let us consider Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000). Its complex 'puzzle plot' (Buckland 2009a, 2009b) centres on Leonard Shelby [Guy Pearce], who is suffering from anterograde amnesia and so cannot form new memories. The film consists of short, seemingly disconnected sequences, which unfold both forwards (in black-and-white) and backwards in time (colour). The viewer is thus placed in a position much like Leonard; both are forced to reconstruct the story in piecemeal fashion, relying on the various visual and narrative clues presented in each out-of-order episode (scrawled notes, annotated photographs, tattooed messages, ambiguous conjectures and so on). The visual style, using black-and-white images for the 'real time' events in Leonard's current situation, and colour for the reverse chronological presentation of his investigation sequences, combines elements of the action/crime film, neo-noir, psychological thriller and art film genres. It also includes the addition of various literary and philosophical references (not only to Jonathan Nolan's short story 'Memento Mori' but also to Oliver Sacks' remarkable literary medical narratives (1986)).[1] It is not surprising that *Memento* has become a philosophers' favourite (possibly trumping *Rashomon* and *The Matrix*) (see Kania 2007). For it not only deals with personal identity, the relationship between memory, identity and moral agency, and our experiences of trauma and grief, it also enacts the kind of rational reconstruction of meaning that renders conscious experience coherent. *Memento* therefore chimes with cognitivist theories of narrative that emphasise the roles of rational inference-making, the testing and adjusting of beliefs, and the cognitive matching of affective tone with perceptual awareness.

Visual Sequencing and Narrative Technique

Noël Carroll (2008) has developed a similar theory of narrative, arguing that narrative is a means of patterning information that requires cognitive processing in order to grasp and resolve the various cognitive puzzles that a

narrative poses. His 'erotetic' (question-and-answer) model – where viewers are driven by a desire to know the answers to narrative questions posed by the film – is an attempt to explain the basic elements of film narrative that dominate contemporary filmmaking (the Hollywood style). As Carroll points out (2008), most films involve *visual sequencing*, the assembling of images into meaningful sequences, most commonly, though not exclusively, used for narrative. Having rejected the 'film as language' thesis, Carroll proposes an alternative model – involving 'attention management' – to account for our ability to make sense of visual sequencing (2008: 122 ff). Movies manipulate audience attention, directing our attention to salient aspects of the image, visual sequence or narrative episode; filmmakers carefully select what we see, from which point of view, in which style, and with what narrative purpose. Our attention is guided by the composition and sequencing of images, which direct us towards the film's intended narrative meaning. We do not require culturally complex competences in decoding film conventions in order to make sense of such sequences; rather, we need only respond using the same perceptual and cognitive abilities that we use in ordinary experience. To be sure, the use of culturally specific codes, conventions, or stylistic features can contribute to or deepen our experience of narrative, adding complexity and density to its meaning, but they are not necessary for the basic understanding of film narrative itself, which relies on more basic perceptual, affective-emotional, imaginative and cognitive processes.

There are a number of ways in which a director or filmmaker can guide our attention. As Carroll suggests (2008: 124), images can use *scale* to emphasise salience (a close-up of a showerhead, for example, as a woman showers alone), and they can be '*variably reframed*' to draw attention to relevant connections between images that we are encouraged to make (the shadow of a raised knife behind the shower curtain, the woman's face, screaming). Carroll identifies three variables in particular that can be used to direct audience attention: *indexing* (bring the camera closer to a salient object or tracking relevant movements or actions), *bracketing* (screening out irrelevant details, objects or spaces, and thus emphasising relevance by selective framing), and *scaling* (altering the scale of the object that is the focus of our concern, thus underlining its significance for the story) (2008: 123–128). To be sure, directors can deviate from all three variables (misleading uses of indexing, bracketing that draws attention to what is off-screen and avoiding obvious forms of scaling); yet most narrative films, even non-standard ones, use all three devices to direct audience attention and thus communicate narrative meaning.

Carroll's 'Erotetic' Model of Narrative

How, then, do meaningful cinematic sequences fit together in a coherent narrative? Carroll's (2008) cognitivist account of '*erotetic narration*' shares similarities with Bordwell's neo-formalist approach. The first feature of the erotetic model Carroll identifies is narrative '*closure*': unlike soap operas with their indefinitely expanding plot lines, movies are supposed to conclude in such a way as to 'tie-up' their various narrative lines. Agreeing with Aristotle's classic definition – stressing the importance of plot as a unity of action with a beginning, middle and end – Carroll highlights the sense of finality for which most mainstream narrative films aim; a fitting conclusion that leaves nothing left for the film to reveal or explain. Why do viewers find narrative closure so satisfying?

Drawing on Hume's essay 'On Tragedy', Carroll points to the way narrative films typically set up a series of questions that pique our curiosity, and then delay their resolution until the film's conclusion. The appropriate 'ending' for the film is one in which all relevant narrative questions posed have been addressed or resolved. Within shorter narrative sequences, smaller 'micro-questions' can be posed and answered. In Brian de Palma's *Body Double* (1984), for example, one wants to know whether voyeuristic protagonist Jake Scully [Craig Wasson] will reach his beautiful neighbour Gloria Revelle [Deborah Shelton] before she is killed by the drill-wielding killer hiding in her apartment. In respect of the whole film, however, the larger narrative 'macro-questions' remain unanswered until the film's conclusion. What is the nature of the murderous plot in which Jake has been cast? Who really killed Gloria? Will Jake be able to rescue Holly Body [Melanie Griffith] from the driller killer's clutches? Whereas plots are generally networks of events and situations held together by various forms of causation, movie narratives are typically 'a network of questions and answers, where the questions are self-generated but then finally resolved' (Carroll 2008: 136). Resolving these self-generated questions is what drives the narrative forward and affords us the satisfaction of a conclusion.

Narrative film manipulates time in order to select and order the various sequences for the purposes of guiding viewer attention. Flashbacks and flashforwards, for example, are conventional ways of organising and manipulating time; they allow the film to provoke questions or answer puzzles and help solicit audience attention until the resolution of salient

questions at the end of the film. *Memento*, for example, uses both devices to great effect, posing (and answering) micro-questions about particular narrative sequences (should Leonard [Guy Pearce] trust Teddy Gammell [Joe Pantoliano]?) and macro-questions (was Leonard responsible for his wife's death?). The desire to pose questions and seek answers to narrative puzzles, for Carroll, is an extension of the 'natural' forms of cognition we deploy in everyday experience. Such questions can involve the significance of details, objects or contexts (what is the significance of the key and of the cellared wine bottles in Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946)?); of character knowledge, belief, affect or motivation (does Devlin [Cary Grant] really love Alicia Hubermann [Ingrid Bergman]?); or concern the broader project of the characters or indeed of the film narrative as a whole (will their plot to expose Nazi collaborator Alexander Sebastian [Claude Rains] succeed?).

Alternatively, art films can refuse to resolve all narrative questions in order to frustrate viewer expectation, provoke thought about narrative conventions, pose questions of a more philosophical nature or intensify associative aesthetic experience. Michael Haneke's *Hidden* [*Caché*] (2006), for example, does all of the above in its refusal to reveal the 'source' of the mysterious surveillance videotapes left on the doorstep of Parisian couple Georges and Anne Laurent [Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche]. The narrative combines elements of the psychological thriller with reflections on the effects of colonialism, our consumption of media images and the traumatic experience of guilt. It concludes with a further unresolved question in the film's final enigmatic shot – perhaps from another surveillance video? – of students leaving school at the end of the day, which reveals (to attentive viewers) George's teenage son Pierrot [Lester Makedonsky] and Algerian Majid's older son [Walid Afkir] in animated conversation before they walk off together. . .

'Juste une image': The Aesthetic Dimension

Both Bordwell and Carroll propose enlightening cognitivist models to explain our ability to reconstruct the story of a film from its plotted images and narrative cues, or to resolve narrative questions by drawing inferences and framing hypotheses that will be resolved at the conclusion of the film. As I shall discuss next chapter, however, Bordwell's constructivist model has been criticised by Gaut (2010: 173–174) for sharply opposing the *construction*

to the *discovery* of meaning in the film's various cinematic structures; for its undervaluing of naturalistic and cultural-historical constraints on interpretation (2010: 176–177); and for positing an overly rigid distinction between comprehension and interpretation.

Before we consider these objections in more detail, there is another criticism worth exploring: namely whether Bordwell's and Carroll's cognitivist models of narrative account adequately for our *aesthetic* experience of cinema. Not all films conform to the canonical narrative style of Hollywood, or are amenable to the 'erotetic', question-and-answer model. Such cases, however, Bordwell and Carroll classify as 'parasitic' on the norms of conventional, narrative films. Art films with 'parametric' styles of narrative – Bordwell mentions classic examples such as Resnais' *La guerre est finie* (1966), Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1962) – present deviant cases that refuse the question-answer format, frustrate our desire for narrative coherence or closure, and in doing so provoke reflection on the conventional norms and expectations that we bring to narrative film. As other cognitivist theorists have argued, on this view canonical narrative models remain the source of norms and conventions that are violated, challenged or transformed by non-mainstream narrative films (see Plantinga 2009b: 86–87).

As Daniel Frampton points out, however, one can also argue that strong cognitivist accounts of film narrative, which emphasise the intellectual operations of film experience, fail to do justice to the sensuous, affective, aesthetic dimension of film (2006: 106–107). Are images simply there to provide information for the cognitive reconstruction of the story or to resolve narrative puzzles set by the film? On the Bordwell/Carroll view, a narrative film can appear akin to a giant Sudoku puzzle principally designed to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. Although viewers do understand and interpret images as sources of narrative information and cues for reconstructing the story, there are also other important ways in which we engage with images in narrative film, ways that are not principally concerned with narrative meaning.

This is what we could call the image's 'aesthetic dimension', those features which contribute to, but also remain independent of, narrative meaning: the images' sensuous qualities, their visual rhythms and tempo, their use of colour, texture and form, their dramatic (and undramatic) moments of singularity in gesture and performance, their mood-disclosing capacities, their orchestrating of aural and visual patterning, their ability to reveal and conceal nuances of expression in the human face and body, their capacity to express movement and time in novel ways and so on. So much of our

aesthetic engagement with cinema concerns these aesthetic dimensions of experience rather than the more narrative-focused elements so dear to cognitivist theorists. To be sure, Bordwell develops a theory of film style, grounded in the appropriation of historically acquired stylistic norms, which can be revealed through formalist analysis of such conventions; but here too the point is to avoid 'impressionistic' interpretation in favour of formalist analysis, generic classification and historical contextualisation. Does this intellectualist account of narrative do justice to the receptive viewer's aesthetic experience of cinema?

Cognitivist theories assume that it is our intellectual satisfaction in reconstructing meaning and solving narrative puzzles that accounts for our pleasure in a film, which is certainly true for most 'canonical' forms of narrative film. On this view, however, it becomes difficult to explain our aesthetic delight in being misled or deceived by a work of art. Why do we enjoy narrative deception? If our engagement with narrative film were primarily about processing and resolving narrative puzzles, one would expect to experience displeasure at having one's desire for cognitive closure thwarted. My response however, to the discovery of the duplicitous narrative presentation in M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999), for example, or the 'impossible' narrative paradoxes in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) is not frustration or embarrassment but pleasure and fascination. That said, a cognitivist might respond that the pleasure lies in the attempt to process the narrative puzzles, not in whether such puzzles are actually resolved by film's end. 'Puzzle films' (Buckland 2009), for example, often seem to intentionally thwart cognitive closure via the resolution of narrative puzzles, which then prompts the engaged viewer to reconstruct or 'replay' the narrative in imagination (or even to see the film again) in order to explore alternative interpretations or to analyse how the narrative puzzles work.[2] A cognitivist might add that 'parametric' films (like *Mulholland Drive*) are principally directed towards this kind of cognitive processing, satisfying the more reflexive viewer, or soliciting the critic's ability to engage in formal analysis or symptomatic readings (or even to surprise us by defying expectations). All of which makes good sense of the cognitive pleasures that such puzzle films can afford.

Nonetheless, this kind of cognitivist approach overlooks the varieties of 'non-cognitive' affective response, cognitive dissonance and visual fascination that such films evoke so powerfully. Cognitivist accounts of narrative, for all their other merits, do not always adequately acknowledge the role of our 'non-cognitive' aesthetic responses to film; the multifarious sensuous and affective ways in which film can provoke altered states of mind, body and

thought. As Deleuze points out, in addition to canonical narrative (defined by what he calls the 'sensory-motor action scheme'), there are also 'pure optical and sound situations' that are not principally concerned with revealing the plot or developing narrative through action (1986: 141–151, 205–215; 1989: 1–24). Rather, these are images concerned with eliciting affect and thought; images that resist familiar interpretative schemata, and thereby open up different ways of experiencing time, movement and the body.

We might gloss Deleuze's point by saying that cognitivist theories risk missing the 'excessive' aspects of the visual image: those dimensions that resist rational reconstruction or cognitive comprehension. To borrow a term from an earlier generation of theorists, we could call this aesthetic dimension of images '*photogenie*'. This term refers to expressive aesthetic power of movement revealed through cinema: the 'magical' aspect of images, what Morin described, quoting a host of other theorists, as '"that extreme poetic aspect of being and things" (Delluc), "that poetic quality of beings and things" (Moussinac), "capable of being revealed to us only through the cinematograph" (both Moussinac and Delluc)' (Morin 2002: 15; see also Andrews 2009). We could gloss this 'photogenic' dimension of images as that which exceeds cognitivist narrative functionality, and thereby exposes the viewer to an intensive experience of aesthetic singularity. There is a rich tradition of films that evoke fascination thanks to this aesthetic or 'photogenic' dimension of images. Think of Falconetti's suffering visage in Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928); the traumatic fascination elicited by Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929); the mesmersising 'pillow shots' in Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953); the unbearable pathos of Nadine Nortier in Bresson's *Mouchette* (1967); the wind blowing mysteriously over grass in Tarkovsky's *Mirror* [*Zerkalo*] (1979); the sublime fields of wheat being harvested in Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978); the visionary encounters with animals in Apichatpong's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010)… Any account of our affective and intellectual engagement with narrative film remains incomplete without some acknowledgment of the aesthetic or 'photogenic' dimension of moving images. It is what we allude to, as Morin observes, when we talk of the 'magic of movies' (2002: 13–17).

Cinematic Authorship

But who (or what), we might ask, is the source of these remarkable images? More prosaically, who (or what) is responsible for the plot and visual style of a film? It is not surprising that narrative film raises the question of authorship,

especially given the influence of literary theory on the theorisation of film. The topicality of authorship, however, has waxed and waned in the history of film studies. The concept of film author or, later, the *auteur* was part of the campaign to legitimate film as art: an organising centre whose artistic vision, authorial control and signature motifs guaranteed the artistic legitimacy of certain films. As the traditional argument goes (despite being subjected to various critiques), works of art are the expression of an artist's intentions; hence films that aspire to the status of art must have their provenance in the intentions of an author. The rise of structuralist, psychoanalytical and critical theories of film, however, challenged the individualist assumptions that underpinned auteur theory. The figure of the *auteur* nonetheless survived, if not as a particular individual, then as a postulated construct unifying the cinematic text. Although *auteur* theory has waned, reports of the death of the (cinematic) author are greatly exaggerated.

The question of authorship reflects a curious state of affairs. On the one hand, it is common to question the plausibility of *auteur* theory; on the other, it is also common to refer to films by their directors, which is to say, their authors (we talk of Douglas Sirk's mastery of melodrama, Wes Anderson's self-reflexive irony, Bong Joon-ho's masterful blending of genres, the visual daring of Gaspar Noé, Agnès Varda's idiosyncratic mix of lyricism and realism and so on). Even Berys Gaut (2010), incisive critic of the doctrine of single authorship, refers to films by the proper name of the director with artistic responsibility for the film.[3] Perhaps precisely because of this ambiguous state of affairs, authorship has returned as a major issue in philosophical film theory.[4]

Indeed, the debate over authorship in the new philosophies of film owes much to debates over authorship in the philosophy of literature (see Chatman 1990). Literary narratives can have narrators, who are usually part of the fictional world being narrated (like Sam Spade in *Farewell, My Lovely*); they also have authors, whether actual (Raymond Chandler, the empirical individual who wrote this novel) or implied ('Chandler' as the authorial persona or agent postulated as responsible for the composition of this text). Both actual and implied authors are external to the fictional or diegetic world of the narrative (Sam Spade takes as real the events he relates truthfully, more or less, whereas for the actual/implicit author Chandler, they are mandated as fictional, which is how they are understood by the reader). Do the same distinctions apply to cinematic fictions?

As a collaborative and industrial art, film introduces a number of complexities to the debate over authorship. Indeed, as Berys Gaut points out

(2010: 99–102), there can be a number of distinct claims and senses relevant to the concept of an author in film. We can make *existential* claims concerning the existence of film authors, who are responsible for the creation of films as works of art. We can postulate an author in order to make *hermeneutic* claims about the interpretation of a film (which is taken to express the author's artistic intentions), or *evaluative* claims about its artistic merit (where a film is compared with others in an author's body of work, or with works by another author, with relevant works in a genre). We can make *ontological* claims, concerning the author as an *actual individual* (Charlie Chaplin, the great filmmaker and comic genius) or Chaplin as a '*textual construct*' unifying various filmic texts (*City Lights* (1931), *The Great Dictator* (1940), *Modern Times* (1936) and so on). The author can be construed as an *artist* (Welles, Hitchcock, Ozu), or as a *textual author*, the composer of a film text analogous to a literary text (Welles as author of *Citizen Kan*e (1941), Ozu as author of *Tokyo Story* (1953)). We can nominate different candidates for the role of cinematic author: most commonly, the *director*, but also the screenwriter, cinematographer, star actor, or the producer and/or production studio (*Finding Nemo* (2003) as a Pixar animated film). Finally, there can be *solo authors* (Errol Morris as author of *The Fog of War* (2003)[5]), or *multiple authors* (Michel Gondry/Charlie Kaufman as authors of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004)). As Gaut observes, variable combinations of these dimensions of authorship are possible; claims for cinematic auteurs generally posit at least one, sometimes several of these claims, in varying permutations (2010: 102).

As we have seen, the construction of a cinematic auteur (typically the director), whatever combination of elements is selected, remains part of the process of legitimating film art (works of art require an author who intentionally creates them). Whereas some forms of cinema are collaborative enterprises with shared authorship, defenders of the solo author model, such as Paisley Livingston (2009a), claim that only some films are authored: those in which an individual artist (the director) exercises sufficient control over the relevant aspects of the filmmaking process (for example, Bergman writing the script for, and then directing, *Winter Light* (1963)). Even in cases where there are significant artistic contributions by other collaborators – say Harriet Andersson's performance of Monika in Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (1953), or the indispensable role played by Bergman's cinematographer Sven Nykvist – these contributory sub-plans, while meshing with Bergman's intentions, are still subordinate to Bergman's creative control over the film. For Livingston, screenwriters, cinematographers, actors or producers can

contribute to, but not define or control, the cinematic realisation of the whole; hence, they cannot be co-authors.

According to Gaut (2010: 118 ff), however, such a model, which acknowledges contributors but not co-authors, has difficulty explaining how the artistic whole of a film can be realised. Moreover, it overlooks the decisive and often independent role played by the various collaborators involved in making a film. Actors frequently argue with directors over the interpretation of a role or presentation of a character in the script. In cases where an actor persuades a director to follow their lead, there is no good reason to deny him or her co-authorship, even if the director retains primary artistic control over the film. Gaut cites the case of Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989), in which Lee saw Pizza parlour proprietor Sal [Danny Aiello] as an unambiguous racist; Aiello disagreed, however, and in the end portrayed him more sympathetically, thus adding nuance and complexity to the film's dramatic treatment of the climactic race riot. Another interesting example is Sigourney Weaver's arguments with Ridley Scott, director of *Alien* (1979), over the interpretation of her character, Ripley (Gaut 2010: 130). Scott wanted Ripley to 'hate' the alien, whereas Weaver argued that Ripley couldn't possibly 'hate' a creature driven by instinct; the end result of their dispute, according to Scott, was 'this incredibly modulated performance' (quoted in Gaut 2010: 130–131), the happy result of the creative tension between actor and director. We can make the same point concerning scriptwriters, cinematographers, editors, producers and other collaborators in the filmmaking process. Thus, films can be co-authored, with many creative contributions to the film as a whole, even if these artistic contributions vary in degree and kind, and even if they are subsumed under the director's authorial accomplishments (praising 'Welles' deep focus camera', for example, rather than the artistic contribution of his cinematographer, Gregg Toland).

Film is a collective and collaborative enterprise, with multiple authors, whose contributions often mesh (and sometimes clash) to produce unanticipated creative achievements. Contemporary practices of criticism and interpretation, moreover, still require the attribution of authorship, whether individual or collective, so the question is how this is best done. One plausible candidate is a critical concept of authorship that admits of multiple authors, that relates filmmaking practice to its broader cultural-historical contexts, but also aims to capture the shared intentionality – between co-authors – that we often need to acknowledge in order to deepen our understanding of a film. By knowing about Nykvist's collaboration with Bergman, or Lee's conflicts with Aiello, Weaver's disagreement with Scott, or

about Toland's contributions to Welles' direction, we gain a more nuanced and complex understanding and critical interpretation of the film. But how widely should we construe film authorship? Should we acknowledge all significant contributors as co-authors? The concept of authorship, after all, is discriminating as much as evaluative. It distinguishes individual films within a coherent body of work, enabling us to make comparisons, pursue parallels and venture interpretations. At the same time, a too narrow concept of authorship can constrain our understanding of film, its contexts of production and of reception, as well as its broader cultural, historical or ideological meaning.

Perhaps, then, we should understand the proper name of the author as naming an artistic event (like the 'Hitchcock' event), analogous with the way we name complex natural phenomena (Hurricane Katrina, the Doppler effect). The proper name 'Hitchcock' would thereby unite the actual/implied author with a distinctive innovation in film style, an 'event-like' contribution to the 'historical poetics' of cinema. One problem with this analogy, however, is that artworks are intentional artefacts whereas natural phenomena are not. On the other hand, one can use the proper name of the author to designate a body of work and stylistic innovation within a history of cinema; this helps preserve a concept of authorship that strives to reconcile the intentionalist sense of the concept with its more functionalist and historicist senses. This unresolved ambiguity – we recognise that films are co-authored, a collaborative enterprise, part of a shared cultural practice, yet usually name them according to their solo director/author (or even their lead star or production house) – suggests that the concept of film authorship continues to evolve. We need not vacillate between taking film, on the one hand, as the expression of impersonal semantic structures, of economic-industrial or ideological-cultural forces, and film as the expression of individual psychology or the mythology of genius, on the other. Instead, we can posit a plural and hybrid concept of authorship that accommodates the multiplicity of aspects we need to take into consideration in understanding and interpreting narrative film.

Is There a Narrator in This Film?

Another puzzling situation arises when we consider the nature of film narration. Perhaps because of the perceived affinities between literary and cinematic fiction, philosophers of film have been exercised by the question of whether films have (implicit) narrators (Branigan 1992; Carroll 2008;

Chatman 1990; Gaut 2010; Wilson 1986, 2009). To be sure, there are narrative films with explicit verbal narrators, characters within the diegetic world who narrate events, usually via voiceover (Walter Neff's [Fred MacMurray's] confessional narration in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), dead screenwriter-narrator Joe Gillis [William Holden] in Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), Lester Burnham [Kevin Spacey] in *American Beauty* (1999), 'The Narrator' [Edward Norton] in David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999), Carrie Bradshaw [Sarah Jessica Parker] in the television series *Sex and the City* (Bushnell/HBO 1998–2004), or the indeterminate character narrators in Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998)). There are also absent/external narrators who comment on characters and events but who do not appear within the diegetic world of the film itself (for example, in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* (2001), P. T. Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999) and Wes Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001)). What of narrative films in which there is no explicit narrator? According to Seymour Chatman's 'a priori' argument (1990), narrative is a kind of *activity*, which thus requires an *agent*, namely the *narrator*, who performs this activity; where there is no explicit narrator, there must be an *implicit* one, the agency responsible for (our access to) the particular images composing the film.

This argument might strike the reader as peculiar. Ordinarily we would say that Hitchcock was the author (whether explicit or implied) of the images comprising the shower scene from *Psycho* (1960). Why postulate such exotica as 'implied narrators' when an (implied) author will do the job? As we shall see below, this is a persuasive response. The interesting point here, however, concerns the ontological status of fiction: how do we viewers gain access to the diegetic (fictional) world of the film? We might think of this implicit narrating agent, for example, as what is often called 'the camera', which is generally identified with the agency of 'the director'. Obviously, the director (with the cinematographer) decides on camera setups and how to frame particular shots; however, neither 'the camera' nor the director is part of the diegetic film-world. I might say, 'Hitchcock's camera rotates on its axis as it zooms out slowly from the open eye of Marion Crane's corpse'; but neither Hitchcock nor his camera is part of the fictional world of *Psycho*, more specifically, of the Bates Motel with its creepy proprietor and famous shower recess. When we talk of directors and cameras in this fashion, we are describing the artistic decisions and stylistic techniques evident in the film, rather than recounting what happens within the fictional world of the narrative. We are doing (low-level) film criticism rather than recounting the story.[6]

There are cases, of course, where the camera and director *are* included within the diegetic film-world, which happens in narrative films that incorporate a 'film-within-a-film' (the film theorist's *mise-en-abyme*). We might think here of Fellini's *8 ½* (1963), de Palma's *Body Double* (1984), or Lynch's *Inland Empire* (2006), which all feature directors as characters, and reveal the cameras used for making the film-within-the-film. In conventional narrative cinema, however, we do not see 'cameras' or 'directors' within the diegetic film-world since they do not exist within that world. Yet the narrative is presented through the composition and arrangement of certain images, with a particular visual style, selectively showing salient details necessary for our understanding of the story. So who (or what), we might ask, is the source of the images showing us these objects, characters, actions and events?

One answer is to posit an *implied narrator*. This is distinct from a verbal narrator, who may also be a character within the fiction (as in Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999); but which character is the narrator here?) or else an impersonal, omniscient narrator (as in P. T. Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999)) (see Thomson-Jones 2008: 75). As Bordwell points out, early film theorists frequently posited the visual narrator as 'witness' or 'guide' to what is relevant in the narrative (1985: 9–12). Such an approach to film narrators, however, strains credulity once it is taken as more than a suggestive metaphor (What kind of entity do have we in mind here? How does this guide manage to gain access to a character's private thoughts? How can they witness, and reveal to us, say in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), a spaceship's balletic movements in space?). While suggestive as a metaphor, the narrator as invisible witness or guide suffers from the difficulty of explaining 'impossible' shots or points of view, as well as how we can have access to the images presented by the implied narrator (see Gaut 2010: 204–205). Do we personally imagine seeing these characters and events from within the fictional world? (I imagine being in the shower alongside Marion Crane.) Or do we perceptually imagine them, impersonally, from outside of the fictional world? (I imaginatively perceive Marion's stabbing within the shower, but from a viewpoint outside of the fictional world). The difficulty with suggesting that we 'make-believedly' imagine the events on screen through the narrator's eyes is that it implausibly personalises the narrative point of view, and demands that we somehow inhabit the diegetic fictional world ourselves (which viewers cannot do).

George M. Wilson (1986) examines another kind of implied narrator. Using a term borrowed from Christian Metz, Wilson describes the '*grand imagier*' or grand image-maker as implied narrator, the imputed source of the images composing the narrative film. The grand-image maker is an intermediary

between fictional and non-fictional worlds; it is thanks to her/him/it that we have access to the images composing the fictional narrative. On this account, however, the implied image-maker sounds suspiciously close to an implied author (director). The relevant difference here, however, is that the narrated events are *fictional* for the implied author but '*real*' for the implied narrator who is part of the fictional world. How, then, do we distinguish between implied author and implied narrator? Indeed, why postulate an implied narrator distinct from the implied author? Why not just say that 'Hitchcock', as implied author, is responsible for the images in the shower scene from *Psycho*?

The question gains urgency in cases involving unreliable narration, a phenomenon well known in literary fiction. Cinematic narrative, however, creates interesting possibilities for unreliable narration due to film's capacity for both visual showing and verbal narration (telling). The visual representation of the narrative shows us the events comprising the story; the verbal representation (dialogue or voiceover) conveys a character's (or narrator's) perspective on the story's events. In some cases, however, there is a conflict between the visual showing and verbal telling of the story. In Bryan Singer's *The Usual Suspects* (1995), both the visual showing and verbal tellings are unreliable for most of the film, since we eventually learn that Keyser Soze, whose story is both shown and told, does not exist (or rather, that he is revealed to be 'Verbal' [Kevin Spacey], the master teller of the tale!). Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950) is another famous case of unreliable narration in that it visually suggests that a dubious account of events is correct. When Johnny tells his friend Eve how he came to be on the run, his false version of events (that Johnny's lover, rather than Johnny, killed her husband) is shown in flashback, thereby suggesting its veracity (since the visual showing of events is usually given credence over a character's verbal telling). Verbal narrators, on the other hand, can be unreliable in revealing the limitations of their own perspective or their inability to grasp the significance of what is shown visually in the narrative. A great example here is Linda's [Linda Manz's] lyrical, naïve voiceover in Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978), which suggests her inability to grasp the true nature of the relationship between her sister Abby [Brooke Adams] and Bill [Richard Gere]). By positing an implied narrator, so the argument goes, the clash between visual showing and verbal telling in unreliable narration can be explained by attributing the unreliability, where appropriate, to either an implied visual narrator or explicit verbal narrator.

Does the case of unreliable narration warrant the postulation of an implied narrator? As Currie argues (1995: 269–270), we are better off postulating an implied author, rather than implied narrator, as the agent

responsible for the unreliable narration. For an implied author (which is not the same as an actual author) can intend for a film narrative to have two (or more) levels of hermeneutic complexity. There can be a superficial version that gives a seemingly accurate account of events (in M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999), child psychologist Dr Malcolm Crowe [Bruce Willis] treats young Cole Sear [Haley Joel Osment], a traumatised child who claims that he can see the ghosts of dead people). There can also be a more complex level that reveals the unreliability of the account given of certain events or of the narrative overall. We only ever see Cole [Osment], for example, speaking directly with Crowe [Willis], even though Crowe appears in various shots with other characters, such as his wife Anna [Olivia Williams] or Cole's mother [Toni Collette], but without ever being directly addressed by those characters. Whoever the actual author of the film turns out to be, the implied author of *The Sixth Sense* can be understood as the agent responsible for the ambiguity between visual showing and verbal telling.[7]

Novels can give us access to a fictional world by way of a third-person omniscient narrator (as in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*). We might ask whether fictional films do the same, although an interesting problem arises at this point. As we have seen, only the author can present events as fictional; the narrator, ensconced within the fictional world, presents these events as being true. If we take the images we see on screen as direct presentations of the characters and events within the fictional world (that is, as 'true' images), then the 'camera' is indeed akin to an implied narrator. If, however, we take the images we see to be representations of fictional characters and events that we *imagine* composing a narrative (that is, as 'fictional' images), then the 'camera' is more akin to an author (implied or actual). It is the latter that is more plausible to describe our experience of narrative cinema. In watching Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* (1950), I both perceive Bette Davis and imagine Margo Channing, a dual perspective allowing me to relish the play of senses in her famous warning ('Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy night'!)

Given the paradoxes that arise once we start to postulate implied narrators, we are probably better off ignoring him or her (or it). Indeed, there is no need to postulate such an entity unless the film explicitly directs us to do so (presumably by way of its author). It certainly behoves philosophers, however, to study more carefully what intelligent and accomplished films have done with the concepts of narrator, author and character. In Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*, narrator and character Addison DeWitt [George Sanders] not only has the power to guide us verbally through the story of Eve Harrington's rise to fame, he can also 'direct' the film – acting momentarily

as its implied author – showing us certain things, avoiding showing others and controlling the film's underscore (as when he 'tells' the film to not show this scene or song but to show something else).

In Pasolini's version of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1972), the paradoxes are dizzying. Pasolini directs the film but also features in it as a character, one 'Geoffrey Chaucer', who appears in the literary text of *The Canterbury Tales* (which he authored) as a hapless pilgrim who tells the worst tale. Pasolini's film is a cinematic 'adaptation' of Chaucer's famous tales, in which Pasolini interprets 'Chaucer' less as pilgrim than as author (Chaucer/Pasolini is seen composing the written text of the separate tales that are depicted cinematically). Chaucer/Pasolini is at once author of *The Canterbury Tales* and author (explicit and implied) of the cinematic tales that we see, playing his authorial role as a character in the film that he has himself authored (as a cinematic adaptation).

In Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997/2007), one of the two tormentors is shot by the unfortunate woman being tortured in her family's affluent summer house. He also has, however, the authorial power of the filmmaker (to direct the images) as well as that of the spectator willing the tormentors to be killed (to 'rewind' the image), after having directly addressed the spectator about what he or she would like to see. He can not only interrupt the narrative but also rewind the film/video and 'replay' the scene so that the shooting never takes place (as the viewer no doubt wishes he or she could do, thus implicating him or her in the consumption of images of violence that is the subject of the film).

In Spike Jonze/Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation* (2002), we see a cinematic adaptation of a non-fictional text (Susan Orleans' *The Orchid Thief*). The film takes as its subject the travails of blocked screenwriter Charlie Kaufman [Nicolas Cage] (the actual screenwriter, if not part-author), as Charlie struggles to adapt *The Orchid Thief* into a cinematic screenplay. Resolving to break his block by writing a screenplay precisely on his experience of failing to adapt *The Orchid Thief*, Charlie's ironic failure turns the film – thanks to the wit and irony of Kaufman/Jonze – into a self-referential meditation on authorship, on adaptation, on screenwriting and on the mysterious alchemy between text and image. In an amusingly ironic twist, Charlie finally succeeds in having his script made into a high concept blockbuster with Gerard Depardieu to play Charlie! *Adaptation* thus turns a potentially ponderous literary-philosophical thought experiment into a self-referential but charming 'puzzle' narrative. In such cases, far from determining who has authorial status or narrative authority, the philosopher-theorist struggles to adapt the creative cinematic thinking of inventive films.

Digital Transformations: Immersion, Interactivity and VR cinema

What about our experience of contemporary audiovisual media? How has the digital revolution changed narrative cinema? Film theory has, for obvious reasons, focused on the kind of spectatorial experience afforded by the traditional cinematic apparatus. With the rise of digital media, emphasising immersive and interactive forms of audiovisual engagement, embodied experience has returned as a key concept and focus in contemporary film theory and philosophy of film (see Hansen 2004). With the shift towards digital media, interactive media and VR technology, moreover, new challenges and questions can be raised about how we are to understand cinematic engagement with narrative and our experience of digital cinema more generally (encompassing these profound transformations and proliferations of the medium).[8] One important issue is the shift from the apparent passivity and transparency of cinematic engagement (the conventions of invisible continuity editing, narrative shot conventions, clearly individuated protagonists and antagonists, personalised causal plot structuration, perspicuous narrative development and clear narrative closure, familiar from what Bordwell calls 'canonical' film narrative) towards greater interactivity and deeply immersive forms of engagement in interactive media and VR narrative (fictional and non-fictional) works – a trajectory, as Grau (2003) shows, with a long history (see Aylett and Louchart 2003; Bollmer 2017; Daniel 2018; Grau 2003; Nash 2017; Ross 2018). A number of theorists argue that, due to its immersive and interactive character, encouraging a sense of 'presence' within the audiovisual world, VR diminishes our awareness of cinematic narrative conventions, including the directing of attention via shot selection, cutting, montage or editing, sound and music effects, lighting, colour, mise en scène and so on (Daniel 2018; Loomis 2016; Nash 2017). VR offers, moreover, a deeply 'immersive' perpetual experience: situating the viewer within the diegetic audiovisual world that allows for both directed perceptual engagement and agential interactive involvement (Griffiths 2008; Grodal 2003; Tikka 2004). In short, with the shift towards immersive interactivity, we are no longer dealing with a spectatorial relationship but rather with a *participatory attitude* and *agential orientation* towards the audiovisual world.

At the same time, we should reflect further on the posited contrast between the 'transparency' of (canonical) narrative cinema and the immersive sense of 'presence' and interactive involvement solicited by VR

technology (Loomis 2016).[9] There are significant contrasts between conventional narrative cinema and VR forms of narrative that help articulate how VR audiovisual works engage us in a multimodal manner. These include the contrasts between 1) *directed* versus *immersive* engagement; 2) *spectatorial* versus *participant* perspectives; and 3) audiovisual *displacement* (via framing, cutting, perspective/point of view/spatio-temporal location) versus audiovisual *continuity* (within a bounded immersive environment, with a unitary time/space, centralised participant perspective and strong alignment between participant/protagonist action and point of view). Examining the relationships between these key contrasts between VR and conventional cinema can help us better understand the transformed version of cinematic experience, as well as aesthetic and ethical potentials of digital cinema, evoked by interactive VR works.

The first contrast, that between *directed* versus *immersive* engagement, refers to the manner in which conventional cinematic narrative explicitly directs our attention, whereas interactive VR narrative immerses us in a fictional world in relation to which we have more attentional agency. Although often described as 'immersive', spectatorial engagement with conventional cinematic narrative is in fact highly orchestrated or directed (prefocused or 'cued' according to a variety of cinematic techniques, generic conventions and audiovisual prompts). Even within the tradition of Bazinian realism or 'slow', contemplative cinema – with its unity of time and space, emphasis on duration and freedom to direct our attention to various elements of the image – cinematic narrative depends essentially on the directing of attention and perceptual focus as well as the modulation of emotional responsiveness. By contrast, in VR narrative the spectator occupies a perspective included within the diegetic world, and has the capacity to direct his/her attention to salient elements, aspects or features of this world according to his or her own will. Our attention is no longer primarily directed or guided by the cinematic techniques or devices deployed by the film – although this still remains a relevant feature – but can be directed by the spectator depending on his/her own perceptual, cognitive and/or emotional responses to the situation in which they are interactively immersed. In some cases, explicit intervention in the diegetic world is invited, even demanded, which transforms the cinematic spectator into a virtual world participant. This presents a challenge for VR cineastes, because it is clearly still necessary, for the purposes of developing the narrative and ensuring emotional engagement, to guide or direct the participant viewer's attention towards salient objects, characters or events (see Daniel 2018). Nonetheless, the

degree of agential activity accorded to the viewer is far greater than in conventional narrative cinema, thus transforming the nature of the spectatorial relationship into an interactive encounter or relationship.

The second, related feature is that the 'spectator' thus assumes a *participatory*, rather than spectatorial, attitude towards the fictional world and the characters that populate it. In conventional cinema, the spectator does not feature within the diegetic world of the narrative; if attention is drawn to the fictional status of the cinematic world, or the spectator addressed directly, this becomes a moment of interruption or distanciation which momentarily suspends and thereby calls attention to both the conventions of cinematic spectatorship and the fictional status of the cinematic work. In the case of interactive VR fiction, however, the viewer is enfolded within the virtual environment, can be addressed by or interact with fictional characters and in some cases intervene in or respond to events that he or she encounters within the audiovisual world. One's attitude towards this world is therefore defined by the possibility of *participatory* rather than (purely) spectatorial engagement, even though large parts of the narrative may involve no direct participation and moments of participatory intervention may be quite rare. Nonetheless, the potential for direct address and agential response is built into the cinematic world in a manner that does not obtain in the fictional worlds of conventional narrative cinema.

The third contrast is more ontological, namely the inherent displacement that defines conventional cinematic spectatorship versus the immanent continuity that characterises VR fictional experience. By this I am referring to the idea that conventional cinema, as Carroll and others have argued, is defined as a 'detached display' that bears no relationship to the spectator's actual spatio-temporal location (there is no relationship between, say, the fictional world of *Citizen Kane* and my lounge room as I watch this film on my television screen). In the case of VR fiction, however, the participatory spectator's perspective is included or 'built into' the fictional world in an immersive, involved, potentially interactive manner. This means that there is an internal relationship between my point of view and the diegetic fictional world that does not exist in the case of conventional cinema. I am able to move, within certain limits, within the fictional world, interact with characters, direct my attention towards different elements of it, departing from the narrative focus of events if I choose, even intervene in and, in some cases, affect the outcome of narrative situations or events. The VR display, in short, is not a 'detached display' but rather an *involved display*: the participatory spectator is immanently involved as a participant within the fictional world

rather than occupying the position of a detached (yet engaged or interested) observer of such a world and the events transpiring within it. Such a display is defined not by 'alienated vision' (Carroll) so much as by 'immersive involvement'. This again has profound consequences for the manner in which VR fictional narratives are made and what kind of aesthetic affordances and modes of ethical experience might be possible with this new medium (or expansion/transformation of the conventional cinematic medium).[10]

What aesthetic as well as ethical implications arise from these differences between conventional and VR fictional narrative in understanding cinematic experience? Do VR and interactive fictional works, due to the immersive interactivity they invite, present a more direct form of ethical engagement than the more detached spectatorial modes defining conventional narrative cinema? A related question concerns the rich potential for hybrid or crossover forms of VR fictional and non-fictional works. How might hybrid VR works prompt us to rethink our conceptions of 'cinema' or indeed of 'narrative' in new ways? Are there ethical differences (concerning the role of empathy, for example) in the way that VR fictional and non-fictional works function compared with conventional cinema? What kind of critical vocabulary or philosophical concepts might we need in order to understand the new kinds of cinematic experience, notably the kind of hybrid spectator/participant – immersive-interactive VR world relationships being explored today? These are some of the most compelling questions facing us in attempting to understand how new digital and interactive media are promising to transform the meaning and potential of cinematic experience in profoundly immersive, enactive and embodied ways.

Part II

From Cognitivism and Phenomenology to Film-Philosophy

4 A.I. Artificial Intelligence: Cognitivism Goes to the Movies

5 Body Double: Adventures in Phenomenology

6 Bande à part: Deleuze's Cine-Philosophy

7 Now, Voyager: Cavell as Film-Philosopher

8 Scenes from a Marriage: On the Idea of Film as Philosophy

9 What is Cinematic Ethics? Cuáron's *Roma* (2018) as Case Study

The new philosophies of film are characterised by their critique of the older paradigm of film theory – so-called 'Grand Theory' – and their recasting of some of the 'classical problems' of film theory (concerning the ontology of film, film as art, understanding narrative, character engagement, authorship and so on). What I have called the analytic-cognitivist turn is the dominant

strain in this new wave of philosophical film theory, but there are other ways of philosophising on film that have also become prominent; alternative paths of thinking that also move away from the older paradigm but draw on hermeneutic, romantic and aesthetic approaches to film (particularly in the 'Continental' tradition). In Part II of this book, I consider some of the most significant and original developments in the new wave of philosophical film theory: cognitivism, film phenomenology, Deleuzian and Cavellian film-philosophy, cinematic ethics, and the idea of 'film as philosophy'. While Chapter 4 on Cognitivism continues the discussion of narrative film developed in the previous chapter, it also explores the ways in which cognitivism has theorised affect and emotion, emotional engagement, and narrative understanding. A new chapter on phenomenological approaches to film then follows, which explores a variety of descriptive approaches to our understanding of subjective but also embodied and contextual dimensions of film experience. I offer some concluding remarks on the ways in which cognitivist and phenomenological approaches might not only intersect but productively supplement each other. Chapters 6 and 7, on Deleuze and Cavell, introduce 'film-philosophy' as an alternative way of philosophising with film. These chapters explore both convergences and divergences between Deleuze and Cavell, both of whom argue that cinema can respond to problems in ways that contribute to philosophical understanding, which thus prepares the way for my elaboration of the idea of 'film as philosophy' in Chapter 8. The latter chapter analyses the claims made by critics and advocates of the bold thesis that films do not simply reflect or illustrate philosophical ideas but can be said to philosophise, by cinematic means, in an independent manner. I conclude this chapter with an argument to show that the film as philosophy thesis is best supported by including philosophical film interpretation. I then turn to the relationship between film and ethics, elaborating and exploring the idea of film as a medium of ethical experience, introducing my first case study – Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* (2017) – as an example of cinematic ethics in action.

4

A.I. Artificial Intelligence: Cognitivism Goes to the Movies

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In a number of survey essays that introduce 'cognitivism' as a new way of theorising film, it is common to find remarks lamenting its relatively marginal status in film studies (see Bordwell 1989a; Carroll 1996; Currie 1999). Although the same point continues to be made today (see Nannicelli and Taberham 2014), in the last 30 years, analytic philosophies of film and cognitivist theory have combined forces to create a formidable research paradigm, despite experiencing only a modest but growing uptake during this time within the institutional contexts of film studies. Bordwell (1985, 1989a, 1989b) and Carroll (1985) pioneered the early wave of film theory that based

itself on analytic philosophy and cognitive psychology. Having attacked 'Grand Theory', Bordwell and Carroll's follow-up collection of essays, *Post-Theory* (1996) showcased the kinds of analytic-cognitivist approaches they hoped would define future research in the discipline. Cognitivist film theory has developed in multiple directions since that time, and become more pluralistic in both its methods and its aims. Nonetheless, it remains a contested approach within some quarters of film studies, despite a proliferating number of publications, journal issues and edited volumes showcasing what it can contribute to the philosophical study of cinema (Brylla and Kramer 2018; Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2015; Nannicelli and Taberham 2014).

Whatever tensions persist, cognitivism has rejuvenated film theory on key questions of affective engagement, narrative understanding and the role of genre. Here again we find a vigorous theoretical revision of the problems of classical film theory. Challenging 'psychosemiological' accounts of unconscious desire, cognitivist theories focus instead on everyday forms of affective and perceptual experience, arguing that we activate the same processes in our engagement with movies. Cognitivism has revised, in particular, three main areas of inquiry: the question of interpretation and our (cognitive) understanding of film; the problem of 'identification' or our affective engagement; and understanding genre, focusing especially on the relationship between genre and the emotion-cueing structure of narrative film.

One challenge facing cognitivist accounts of emotion, understanding and character engagement, however, is how to deal with films that resist the kind of cognitive mapping invited by mainstream narrative film. How do we explain our affective and aesthetic responsiveness to films that thwart narrative expectations and disrupt routine cognitive reasoning processes? How would a cognitivist approach deal with films like Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) or Apichatpong's *Memoria* (2021)? Such questions (and films) suggest that we need to consider 'non-cognitive' affective responses as part of any nuanced account of our affective, emotional and aesthetic engagement with film. This challenge has been taken up in recent work by cognitivist theorists, who have tackled what I am inclined to call 'the hard problem' of cinematic aesthetics (how do we get from the very general cognitive, neurophysiological and affective bodily processes and generic responses to moving images to particular aesthetic pleasures and modes of fascination afforded by great films?) As I discuss in the concluding sections, they offer some fascinating and compelling analyses of why particular aesthetic features of cinema have the effects that they do, although the question still remains how best to approach the aesthetic dimension of such films.

The Critique of Psychoanalytic 'Identification'

As Bordwell (1989b), Currie (1999) and Plantinga (2002) all observe, cognitivism in film theory emerges during the late 1980s and 1990s as an alternative to psychoanalytic theories of film identification. As is well known, a key turning point for psychoanalytic film theory was Lacan's famous theory of the 'mirror stage' (2006 [1936]: 75–81). For Lacan, the developing infant begins to identify with a unified (mirror) image of its own body (between six to 18 months), but misrecognises itself in doing so due to the disparity between its unified ideal image and its underdeveloped sensory-motor capacities. According to Lacan, this condition of misrecognition distorts and deflects the development of our imaginary psycho-sexual self-image, and thus motivates our (unconscious) tendency to restore a sense of psychic unity by identifying with idealised ego surrogates (like movie stars). Drawing on Lacan, psychoanalytic film theories thus distinguished between *primary* identification (with the point of view of the camera) and *secondary* identification (with a character as a psychological surrogate or ideal ego type). According to Baudry (2004a, 2004b) and Metz (1974, 1982), for example, the primary identification with the all-seeing viewpoint of the camera offers the spectator an illusory sense of mastery over the film's visual field. Feminist theorists such as Laura Mulvey (1975) famously extended this analysis to include *secondary identification* with a character, aligned along gendered hierarchies that privileged a masculine 'gaze' (identifying with a male character as source of narrative action, while taking female characters as objects of the character's, hence spectator's, 'masculinised' gaze).

This concept of 'identification' has generated a plethora of criticisms by analytic-cognitivist theorists (Bordwell 1996: 15–17; Prince 1996). We can summarise these criticisms under two heads: 1) the lack of clarity in the concept of identification, which covers a multitude of conflicting meanings; and 2) the lack of empirical evidence for psychoanalytic theory, or its selective use of evidence in order to make sweeping generalisations about human psychosexual development. According to critics like Carroll, it is unclear, for example, what it would mean to 'identify with the camera' since the camera is not a character ('identifying' with the director or a directorial point of view raises the same thorny issues of authorship we discussed earlier). Moreover, the psychoanalytic concept of 'identification', Carroll claims, posits a kind of numerical identity relation or 'Vulcan mindmeld' (Carroll 1990: 89) that is

supposed to hold between my perception and that of a character or the camera. According to the second criticism, psychoanalytic theory ignores commonsense intuitions, offering a speculative account of 'identification' that remains under-supported by empirical evidence (Prince 1996). Secondary identification, for example, rests on a dubious account of psychosexual development, a politicised critique of gender bias in cultural representations, coupled with an implausibly 'deterministic' account of the manipulative ideological power of narrative film. Pathological or deviant cases – fetishism, voyeurism, sadism and so on – are taken to be paradigmatic of the general processes of spectator 'identification'. Psychoanalytic theory, on this view, is prone to taking the exceptional case as revealing the general rule.

We can question these key points of the analytic-cognitivist critique. Take the distinction between our commonsense intuitions concerning 'identification' and the theoretical concept developed by psychoanalytic theory. The latter concept is explicitly different from the commonsense notion, and indeed questions whether we can assume that our intuitions are psychologically reliable or ideologically neutral. Psychoanalytic 'primary identification' does not refer to identifying with characters but to the process enabling the spectator to enjoy an illusory mastery over the visual field of the film. To cite commonsense intuitions as evidence against a claim that such intuitions may be specious is to beg the question. Indeed, the issue at stake is whether such intuitions *are* reliable or truthful, or whether they are ideologically tainted sources of knowledge or evidence. The same point applies to the question of gender: to assert that we are not subject to ideological manipulation in respect of cultural representations of gender because we do not believe or feel ourselves to be so manipulated is again to beg the question. For the kind of ideological influence at issue here is that which would manipulate or distort our intuitions or assumptions concerning 'normal' gender identity in an unconscious or subthreshold manner. This is precisely the matter to resolve in such disputes, and so it cannot be cited as evidence settling the debate. Suffice to say, this dispute is far from over; some aspects of cognitivist psychology may even turn out to help reform, rather than refute, psychoanalytic theories.

Whatever the case, the growing dissatisfaction with psychoanalytic film theory, not only amongst cognitivists but also within film studies more generally, prompted a variety of alternative cognitivist theories. Currie identifies two related themes characterising the cognitivist approach. 1) That we take films to be rationally motivated, and thus endeavour to make sense of a work at each of its various levels of presentation (as sensory stimulus in light

and sound, as narrative and as cultural object expressing higher-order meanings). And 2), that we approach the process of making sense of film as one that deploys the same cognitive processes and perceptual resources that we also deploy 'in making sense of the real world' (Currie 1999: 106). The corollary to these two themes, we might add, is that cognitivists assume that 'irrational' processes – as thematised in psychoanalysis – are of marginal interest in accounting for our experience of film; and that we *can* rely on ordinary processes of cognition – including intuitions – as evidentiary sources for claims about our experience of film (points shared by phenomenological approaches). Cognitivism as a research programme, furthermore, applies scientifically informed 'theories of perception, information processing, hypothesis-building, and interpretation', in tandem with an analytical, problem-focused philosophy oriented towards the natural sciences (Currie 1999: 106). How does this cognitivist map relate to cinema?

Making Meaning: Bordwell's Cognitivism

Bordwell's 'constructionist' cognitivism (1985) combines elements of cognitivist theory with a theoretical framework borrowed from the Russian formalists. By 'constructionist', however, Bordwell means an account of cognitive processes that emphasises the active role of the subject in hypothesising, making inferences and drawing conclusions that go beyond what is immediately 'given'. This kind of *cognitive* constructionism applies not only to ('bottom-up') processes of perception and affective engagement, but also to higher-order ('top-down') processes of comprehension, interpretation and evaluation. We do not passively perceive or automatically understand the world; rather, we apply concepts and cultural schemata to sensory inputs in order to 'construct' coherent and meaningful cognitive experience.

So how *do* we understand movies? Bordwell (1985: 48–62) distinguishes between our *comprehension* of the film narrative (understanding the referential meaning of the images pertaining to the narrative world); our more complex *interpretations* of the film (grasping implicit meanings, themes, symbolic motifs and so on); and the critic's *symptomatic* readings of a film's 'suppressed' psychological or ideological meanings (which reflect deeper psychic or cultural-historical forces). Take Welles' *Citizen Kane*, for example: we can comprehend the narrative film-world of Charles Foster

Kane [Orson Welles], successful media tycoon, unhappy husband and failed politician, whose life reporter Jerry Thompson attempts to investigate. We can interpret the implicit meaning of key scenes or narrative elements (for example, the meaning of Kane's dying word, 'Rosebud', and hence the tragic significance of his forgotten childhood sled as it is consumed by flames). The critic can also posit a symptomatic reading of the film, elaborating its suppressed or indirect meaning (*Citizen Kane* as an allegory of the self-destructive 'masculinist' drive for phallic power, or a narrative expression of the American/capitalist ideology of (flawed) individual genius, hyper-ambitious egoism and so on). Film theory and criticism, Bordwell claims, focus on implicit and symptomatic interpretation, thus generating a variety of 'readings' that draw on favoured 'semantic fields' (discourses or theoretical frameworks), and which conform to institutionalised hermeneutic routines.

Although widely influential, Bordwell's cognitivist account of narrative has also been subjected to various critiques. Berys Gaut (2010: 164–179), for example, argues that Bordwell overemphasises the role of what Gombrich called the 'viewer's share' (as well as institutional routines) in the construction of film meaning. Bordwell's concept of 'construction' encompasses quite distinct cognitive processes, only some of which may involve a degree of construction. Gaut identifies three relevant senses of the term that are operative, if not thematic, in Bordwell's account. First, *conceptual* construction, which refers to the application of concepts to visual arrays guided by shared background knowledge (Gaut 2010: 170). Secondly, *normative* construction, which refers to how movies, like other artworks, are 'incomplete', and require 'fleshing out' by the viewer (Gaut 2010: 172). Examples here would include the way in which we extrapolate from 2D images in order 'construct' a film-world of 3D objects (we perceive 2D objects but visually imagine that they are 3D). 'Construction', however, can also refer to the way that practitioners generate interpretations and evaluations by mapping concepts from 'semantic fields' on to relevant narrative cues, following the established routines and norms of institutions of criticism. This third, more radical sense is what Gaut calls 'critical school constructionism'; a radical constructionism that 'really does entail that meanings are made, not found' (2010: 173–174). If a new school arises, or applies different semantic fields to the film, different meanings are attributed to the film, which are accepted as legitimate or not by the relevant critical school. Thus we can speak of a 'Lacanian', a 'Deleuzian' or a 'post-colonialist' reading of a film and so forth.

The problem, according to Gaut, is that Bordwell's model conflates these distinct senses of 'construction', and thus relativises understanding and

interpretation either to the individual viewer or to a relevant critical school or community of interpreters. To overextend the concept in this way, however, is to risk conflating conceptual, normative and institutional senses of construction. It is one thing to 'construct' perceptual experience by making inferences that go beyond immediate sensory inputs; it is another to map concepts drawn from a particular 'semantic field' (or what Foucault called a 'discourse') in order to produce, say, a psychoanalytic reading of a film. If everything is 'construction', then nothing really is, since the term loses conceptual specificity and therefore explanatory power and theoretical plausibility.

Rehearsing a criticism that has also been made of 'social constructionism', Gaut argues further that a constructionist account should not imply that whatever we perceive, understand or interpret is therefore a 'construct' (2010: 170). Perception can be 'constructed' in that the cognitive processing of sensory inputs goes beyond what is immediately given; but this does not mean that the objects we perceive are 'constructions', hence a matter of cultural convention or subjective invention. On the contrary, there are both naturalistic and cultural-historical constraints on interpreting film that question the view that such interpretations are simply 'constructed' by institutionalised film theorists. If we take the 'semantic fields' and institutional norms governing practices of criticism as authoritative, then we lose the hermeneutic constraints that formalist and historicist approaches to criticism can provide.[1] The result, over time, is a relativistic proliferation of interpretations, which fail to provide 'an independent brake' on whether they are 'valid' for the work in question (Gaut 2010: 175). How do we know, in other words, when we are 'making meaning' or just making it up?

The counterexample Gaut cites against Bordwell's constructionism refers to the significance of cross-cultural differences for interpreting film style. Welles' use of low-angle shots, Gaut points out, might well signify power and stature in *Citizen Kane*, but the same kind of shots do not have this meaning in Japanese cinema (2010: 176). This is because low-angle shots in such films can reflect a culturally specific vantage point: the view one might have while seated on a traditional *tatami* mat, as one finds, for example, in Kurosawa's *Rashomon*. Such counterexamples, Gaut argues, suggest that practices of interpretation and evaluation are not simply 'constructed' but are subject to various normative constraints, be they cultural, historical or 'institutional' (2010: 177–179).

In response, however, one could argue that Gaut's contrast between the use of low-angle shots in *Citizen Kane* and in Japanese films is itself open to

question. Welles' celebrated low-angle shots do not always straightforwardly signify 'power' or 'authority' but work ironically as well: the team of Welles/Toland both deploy and subvert this conventional assumption, showing at once the stature and superficiality of Kane's self-image as leader destined for power and glory.[2] Gaut's example, moreover, echoes Bordwell's own insistence on historical specificity and attention to style.[3] Indeed, Gaut's point about placing the low-angle shots from *Rashomon* in their proper historical and hence cinematic context inadvertently supports Bordwell's claims for his 'historical poetics': a practice of critical interpretation and evaluation that analyses formal elements with regard to historically shared norms of film style.

The 'Paradox' of Fiction?

We are all no doubt familiar with our affective and emotional responses to film. Although the kinds of emotions elicited by fictional film are similar to those experienced in ordinary life, they are accompanied by an awareness of the *fictionality* of what we are seeing (Plantinga 2009a: 77). In Almodóvar's *All About My Mother* (1999), for example, I feel shock, pain and sympathy for Manuela [Cecilia Roth] as she cries out, reaching for the head of her dying son Esteban, who has just been hit by a car; but I also know that I am seeing a fictional scenario and that neither Manuela nor Esteban actually exist. Nonetheless, I find myself choking with tears. How so?

The fact that we can experience emotional responses to fictional characters has perplexed many philosophers. Does it confirm the traditional (Platonic) philosophical suspicion of emotions as conflicting with reason? Are the emotional responses we experience in response to fictions still 'rational'? Are these genuine emotional responses or 'simulated', pretend emotions? These questions have become important for cognitivist film theorists, and answering them has tended to track the so-called 'paradox of fiction' (how can I be emotionally engaged with fictional characters that I know do not exist?). We can state this paradox, first articulated by Colin Radford (1975), as follows: 1) we respond emotionally to what we believe to be actual; 2) fiction presents us with scenarios and characters that we do not believe to be actual; 3) yet we nonetheless respond emotionally to such fictional characters and scenarios. According to Radford, we cannot hold all three propositions without falling into contradiction; hence our apparent capacity to respond emotionally to fiction is 'irrational, incoherent, and inconsistent' (1975: 78).

Radford's conclusion does not seem persuasive to many philosophers or theorists of the arts. What purpose is served, other than to disenfranchise art, by arguing that it is 'irrational' to respond emotionally to it? Whatever our response to this question, our enjoyment of fiction does seem to present a puzzle: if we do not believe that fictional characters exist, how can we be moved by the depiction of their plight? Three competing responses have emerged as ways of accounting for our emotional engagement with fiction: 'pretence theory', 'illusion theory' and 'thought theory' (see Carroll 1990: 60–88). Kendall Walton (1990) is the best-known exponent of 'pretence theory', which claims that we have 'quasi-emotional' responses to fictional characters, where cinematic images serve as props within an elaborate game of fictional 'make-believe'. In effect, Walton denies the third premise, namely that we *do* respond emotionally to fictional characters or scenarios. If our emotional responses were real, I would feel moved to take some kind of action in response to an emotionally stirring scene. Since I do not, they are not.

This approach seems dubious from a phenomenological point of view, relying again on the philosopher's appeal to commonsense intuitions about emotion and fiction. Walton's paradigm case is the child's game of make-believe: when we play such a game, we pretend to be in a (genuine) emotional state (the child pretends to be afraid of her father pretending to be a monster). Likewise with fiction, Walton claims, which is the adult version of a game of make-believe. The problem with this analogy, however, is that we enter into and enact such games voluntarily. Our emotional responses to fictional scenarios, however, are largely involuntary (unless I am acting, I cannot readily will myself to laugh at a comic scene or cry at a tragic one). Do I really engage in a game of make-believe, pretending to be 'really' sad, as I witness Manuela's crying grief for her dying son? Consider the affective and emotional responses one experiences in witnessing a violent fight, a moral injustice or a sex scene: do I merely pretend to be viscerally revulsed, morally indignant or erotically excited? Can one be 'make-believedly' aroused? These kinds of 'quasi-emotions' do not account for the involuntary responses that we frequently experience with fictional films (like horror). Nausea, disgust, revulsion and the 'startle effect' suggest that, for some emotions, there are significant involuntary, bodily-physiological responses that are not 'make-believe'.[4] Moreover, the idea of 'quasi-emotions' seems peculiar, since it requires us to distinguish real from fictional emotions, which seem to differ from each other principally in their object. As Carroll argues, however, having a genuine emotional reaction to someone telling us terrible news does not suddenly change into a fictional emotion if it turns out that the person was telling us a lie (1990: 61).

'Illusion theory' denies Radford's second premise, namely that fiction presents us with characters and scenarios that we do not believe to be real. Variants of this view include the traditional 'suspension of disbelief' idea (Coleridge), Freudian concepts of disavowal within psychoanalytic film theory (Metz) and so on. This approach, not much in favour today, maintains that we do come to believe (or partially believe) fictional characters or scenarios to be in some sense real. The standard objection to this view is that, if this were the case, even partially, what we take to be actual would move us to act or react in some way, not to mention lose sight of the fact that we are engaging with fictions. The fact that I do not feel moved to act on my belief suggests that I do not literally believe the fiction or its characters are real. However moved I may be by Manuela's pain and her son's fatal injuries, I do not find myself calling for an ambulance.

The most promising response is to deny the first premise – that we respond emotionally to what we believe to be actual – and that is the path taken by the 'thought theory'. According to this view, it is *the thought* of the character in that particular situation that generates the relevant emotion, rather than a belief that this might actually be the case (Carroll 1990: 79–87). We do not need to believe in the literal existence of vampires in order to feel frightened by the thought of Nosferatu bearing down upon his hapless victim. Rather we can mentally represent this idea, entertain the unasserted thought or propose in imagination the idea of a vampire; and that is all we require in order to feel fear, dread, but perhaps also awe, at the shadow of Nosferatu's claws silhouetted in the dark.

A recent variant of 'thought theory' is Greg Currie's account of 'simulation theory', which maintains that the viewer mentally simulates, in imagination, the relevant state of mind (beliefs, desires and so on) of the character within that fictional scenario, and by allowing this simulation to (mentally) run, we can arrive at an understanding of the character's subjective states (Currie 1995). As Carroll put it, we simulate a character mentally by 'being immersed in a virtually continuous process of replicating the emotions and desires of (especially) the protagonists' (2008: 172). Simulation theory, however, seems to imply a rather rigid alignment between viewer and character, such that I need to simulate his or her attitudes and responses in order to experience an appropriate affective or emotional response. This approach, however, does not account for the variability of our engagement with characters, the fact that we can have a different view or attitude to the situation than the character or that we can sympathise with characters with whom we do not share attitudes or beliefs. Nor does it deal well with the possibility that we can

interrupt this simulation in order to reflect on the character's predicament, or the actor's performance, or the cinematic presentation, all of which contribute to our affective and emotional responses to film.

Once again, we can question the kind of phenomenology of emotions that 'thought theory' seems to assume. 'Thought theory' makes affective and emotional response dependent on having the appropriate thought or belief, which does not account well for affective responses in cases where such a thought may be absent or obscure (when I cannot identify or readily name what 'thought' is being expressed in one of the many anxiety-inducing sequences in David Lynch's films). Nor does it really address the bodily, sensorial, visceral dimension of our affective engagement, which also depends upon various non-conscious neuro-physiological processes (see Robinson 2005). My feeling of helpless horror (in de Palma's *Carrie* (1976)) as I watch fragile Carrie White [Sissy Spacek] about to be drenched with a bucket of pig's blood just as she is being crowned Homecoming Queen is not simply a matter of entertaining the thought of such a scenario and finding it unpleasant (although this also plays a role). Indeed, one of the virtues of this scene is the manner in which it elevates a tawdry, clichéd teen flick scenario – the thought of a nasty, humiliating prom night trick being played on a vulnerable teen by the dominant 'mean girl' – to the level of devastating art horror. Nor is it a matter of my simulating in imagination how I might feel, standing on the stage, with a feeling of cautious pleasure, having finally overcome my fear, shyness and religiously abusive mother, only to be humiliated in the most abject and appalling manner. The scene is a good example of how we do not have to be aligned with a character's mental state in order to feel a (moral) allegiance with them. We feel appalled about what is about to happen to poor Carrie, who is unaware of the impending catastrophe, as well as feeling sympathy for her friend, Sue [Amy Irving], who does realise what is about to happen – painfully revealed in slow motion – but is powerless to prevent it. My affective and emotional engagement with a scene such as this involves, rather, a complex interplay of bodily, visceral responses, moral sympathy and emotional attunement, hermeneutic reflection on the narrative situation and aesthetic appreciation of de Palma's skilful heightening of tension and suspense. There is more at stake in my emotional response to the film than the thought of the scenario alone.

To return to our earlier example, Almodóvar's cinematic presentation of Esteban's death and Manuela's grief is not simply a matter of the characters' actions or narrative content. It depends as much on the aesthetic mood and cinematic mode of presentation of the scene. There are a number of

significant elements here. We might list the pounding rain, the striking colour palette, Esteban's pleading expression against the car window, the silencing of the underscore to heighten our affective attunement, the tilting image from the perspective of the dying Esteban, the expressiveness of Cecilia Roth's face, Manuela's harrowing cry of grief, the raw sound of her pain. Our affective and emotional engagement with this scene cannot be reduced to the thought being expressed, or to simulating the emotional responses of characters, but involves sensuous, bodily and aesthetic elements that heighten our receptivity to, and resonance with, the emotions portrayed on screen.

These remarks suggest that the most promising way of resolving the paradox of fiction is to question the assumption that we can only have emotions towards what we take to be real. As Thomson-Jones remarks, we can maintain that emotions are cognitive in nature, but question whether emotions always require beliefs (2008: 108). We can have emotional responses to *imagined* situations or events, as is readily attested by daydreams and fantasies, not to mention fictional narratives. The cognitive dimension of emotions, we might argue, involves having the relevant perceptual construals (Plantinga), thoughts and beliefs (Carroll), and imagined responses, which relate to the fictional character or scenario in question. Alternatively, we can deny that emotions are cognitive, and argue that they are primarily bodily and neurophysiological, priming us, through 'unconscious' bodily and physiological processes, for heightened perception and relevant action (Robinson 2005).

An attractive pluralist approach that combines elements of both these strategies has been developed by Carl Plantinga (2009a), who likewise denies that we can only have emotional responses to what we believe to be actual. We can dissolve the paradox of fiction once we adopt a 'moderate cognitivism' denying that emotion depends on belief (Plantinga 2009a: 77). It may be that we require some kind of evaluative belief concerning the specific characteristics of the character or situation in question, for example that a certain character is frightening, or fascinating, or pitiable (I have to entertain the notion that vampires have frightening characteristics, even if I do not believe that they actually exist). Nonetheless, if we can entertain 'unasserted thoughts' concerning the character, as Plantinga argues, then we can resolve the apparent paradox of our emotional engagement with him or her. Simply put, we can imagine them and their situation, and respond emotionally to these imaginings. If I imagine the character thus, I can respond emotionally to him or her without being committed to any definite beliefs concerning the character's existence (I can find Hannibal Lecter both fascinating and

frightening without having to worry about whether he exists or not). The so-called paradox of fiction is merely apparent; an indication of the confusing assumptions we bring to our experience of emotion in response to fiction.

To return to our example, the emotional effect of Cecilia Roth's performance in *All About My Mother* is dependent upon my construal of her situation perceptually, imaginatively, cognitively and aesthetically. I can imagine or entertain various 'unasserted thoughts' concerning Manuela's character (thanks to Roth's performance and Almodóvar's direction), and thus enjoy an affective and emotional engagement with her, independent of any definite beliefs about her existence. Imaginative emotional engagement thus offers one way of dissolving the paradox of being moved by fictional characters that we believe do not exist.

More generally, we can extend Plantinga's point and argue that the phenomenological experience of emotional response is too complex to be reduced to a simple cognitive stance (a propositional content, entertaining a thought or belief, imagining that such and such is the case). Emotional responses orchestrate different levels and layers of affective attunement, bodily responsiveness, imaginative involvement and psychological cognition (sympathy and empathy). The so-called paradox of fiction arises only if we ignore this complex phenomenology and make the 'intellectualist' assumption that emotion either presupposes beliefs or does not. The experience of affective attunement and emotional resonance that primes us for and intensifies our aesthetic engagement with film shows us that we need an appropriate phenomenology of emotions if we wish to better understand the nature of our emotional engagement with movies.

Affect and Emotion

Although much debate on emotions in analytic-cognitivist philosophy of film has been dominated by the so-called 'paradox of fiction', in recent years the problem of emotion has become a central topic in cognitive film theory. Cognitivist theories of emotion can explain many aspects of our emotional engagement with more conventional forms of narrative cinema and enable a sophisticated engagement with genre and its role in eliciting emotional responses. They encounter their limits, however, in dealing with films that thwart these more familiar kinds of cognitive mapping, and which open up varieties of aesthetic experience that are not strictly 'cognitive' in the narrow sense. Once again, recent work in cognitive theory has begun to explore

these challenges by focusing on the role of mood in art and on the importance of 'non-cognitive' forms of affect in our broader emotional engagement with cinematic narrative. I therefore turn now to explore the relationship between cognitivist and phenomenological accounts of mood in film. I conclude with some critical reflections on the challenges facing contemporary cognitivism, namely how to avoid the twin extremes of intellectualism and aestheticism, and how phenomenological approaches to cinema might provide some ways of responding to these challenges.

It may seem obvious that narrative film works dramatically by eliciting and modulating affect and emotion. Yet until recently, emotion was a relatively neglected topic in film theory and philosophy of film. Today, however, studies of emotion, affect, character engagement and genre have been flourishing (see Coplan 2006, 2011; Coplan and Goldie 2011; Grodal 2009; Hanich 2010; Laine 2011, 2015; Neill 2006; Plantinga 2009a, 2009b, 2018; Plantinga and Smith 1999; Prinz 2011; G. Smith 2003; M. Smith 1995; Stadler 2008; Tan 1995). To ask an obvious question, why does emotion matter? Carl Plantinga identifies five ways in which affect and emotion are essential for narrative film: 1) Because of the pleasure, value or emotional significance (personal and social) that they afford. 2) Because they provide narrative information by drawing the spectator's attention to salient features of the narrative situation, creating sympathy and antipathy for various characters. 3) Because they intensify the phenomenological experience of the film, both bodily (accelerated heartbeat, tensing of muscles, laughing or moaning) and aesthetically (lending significance, quality and imaginative power to particular scenes). 4) Because they are connected with various cognitive processes, such as inferences and evaluations, which are essential to the understanding of film. And 5), because they have rhetorical and ideological significance, influencing how we feel and think about the world and others (Plantinga 2009a: 5–6, 2009b: 86). The polymorphous pleasure in movies flows from a combination of cognitive play (solving narrative problems, puzzles, enigmas), visceral experience (thrills and spills), sympathy (for multiple, often conflicting characters), narrative satisfactions (cueing emotional, visceral and cognitive experience), and reflexivity (where cultural awareness of film genre, style, history and so on meets social communication and sub-cultural belonging) (Plantinga 2009a: 39).

What do we mean, then, when we talk of 'affect' and 'emotion' in film? Although commonly used as synonyms, philosophers and psychologists usually distinguish affect and emotion depending on whether these have a definite object or cognitive content. Feeling nausea is an (unpleasant)

affective-bodily state; feeling pride in having accomplished a difficult task is an emotional-cognitive state. Human emotions are complex phenomena, but speaking generally we can define them as mental states accompanied by physiological and autonomic nervous system changes, subjective feelings, action tendencies (where emotional responses prime us towards certain kinds of action) and outward bodily behaviours (facial expression, bodily posture, gestures, vocalisations and so on) (Plantinga 2009b: 86). Affect, on the other hand, we can broadly define as 'any state of feeling or sensation' involved in conscious cognition (Plantinga 2009a: 29). Affect differs from emotion in being without a definite object, whereas emotions are directed towards intentional objects (Gaut 2010; De Sousa 1987; Plantinga 2009a; Roberts 2003). I feel the warmth of the sun and enjoy the sensation of water as I swim; but I suddenly feel panic and fear at the dark submerged shape moving rapidly towards me beneath the waves.

Arguments abound, however, over the precise nature of emotion. Carroll (2008), for example, distinguishes between affects, which are structurally more primitive, and emotions, which are affects with a complex structure integrating feeling with 'computation' or a cognitive construal (Plantinga 2009b: 86). For a strong cognitivist like Carroll, emotions have a definite cognitive content such as a thought or a belief; emotions are just affective responses coupled with the relevant belief or thought. Emotions thus provide important cognitive information concerning our environment by combining feeling with cognitive appraisals (my anger at a reckless driver depends upon my conviction that people should drive safely, that this driver has endangered me, is a reckless driver and so on). For other theorists (like de Sousa 1987; Plantinga 2009a; Prinz 2004; and Roberts 2003), emotions involve cognitive appraisals but these do not have to be beliefs; emotions can involve concern-based construals that are largely perceptual in nature (my anger expresses a concern-based construal of a situation that I perceive as dangerous, threatening or provocative). Finally, for some theorists, like Robinson (2005), emotion is not necessarily cognitive, but it can be understood as primarily a bodily, physiological phenomenon, activating a variety of neurological and bodily processes priming us for responsive action.

Plantinga (2009a) offers a pluralist approach to emotion, arguing that they are bodily-mental responses that span perceptual, affective and cognitive registers. Cinematic emotions, in particular, are elicited by our immersive (bodily, affective and cognitive) experience of narrative film. Following Robert C. Roberts, Plantinga defines emotions as *concern-based construals* (2009a: 55–56 ff.) that are at once perceptual and cognitive,

intentional and embodied. They can be understood as encompassing an agent's judgments or perceptions of 'how a situation affects her or his concerns', where such construals are also relationally defined with regard to those of other agents (Plantinga 2009a: 9, 49). Emotions, on this view, express 'a mental state that is accompanied by physiological arousal' (Plantinga 2009a: 54), a heightened perceptual, affective and cognitive receptivity towards our situation as well as that of others.

So how do emotions figure in our experience of film? For many theorists, mainstream Hollywood seems to offer an ideal opportunity for the study of the relationship between emotion and cinema. On the one hand, as Plantinga remarks, it is clear that Hollywood films are 'packaged experiences, commodities designed to engage audiences affectively and emotively', yet they also provide a clear case study of filmmaking practice specifically designed for eliciting emotional engagement (2009a: 6). Hollywood is 'a particularly emotional cinema', according to Plantinga, avoiding the distantiation or intellectualism of much European and international art cinema (2009a: 7).[5] Such films typically fall into three broad classes: 1) 'robustly sympathetic films' that encourage emotional congruence with sympathetic characters; 2) 'action films' dedicated to eliciting sensation, excitement or spectacle; and 3) 'humorously ironic' films that replace distance with humour and irony (Plantinga 2009a: 6–7). Mainstream narrative films typically emphasise emotional engagement and strive to avoid boredom, whether through action and spectacle or by sympathy and humour. They therefore display a variety of visual and narrative techniques designed for eliciting and modulating affective and emotional responses. These include the elicitation of sympathy for characters, the elaboration of prototypical or 'paradigmatic' narrative scenarios and 'prefocused' cueing of appropriate affective responses to stylised narrative situations.

Emotional Engagement

How does our emotional engagement with character work? Film viewers often describe their enjoyment of narrative film as a matter of 'identifying' with the characters. One common view is that films eliciting such identification are absorbing and moving, whereas films that do not are unengaging or even boring. A conversation between film fans might run thus: 'I loved *All About My Mother*; I could really identify with Manuela, but also with Huma and Agrado!' 'Did you like *Inception*?' 'No, I couldn't relate to

Cobb at all. He seemed more like a computer game avatar than a real character, and his relationship with his wife Mal wasn't very convincing'. For the first speaker, it is all about emotional engagement with the characters; for the other the problem is precisely the lack of such emotional engagement.[6] How, then, do we account for this more familiar 'folk' sense of identification as emotional engagement with characters?

As discussed above, many cognitivist theorists have criticised the concept of 'identification' operative in psychoanalytic accounts. Some philosophers, however, such as Gaut (2010), have argued that the concept of identification at issue here requires refinement rather than rejection. Carroll, for example, construes 'identification' as referring to an *identity* relation between viewer and character; moreover, that the strong alignment, even fusion between viewer and character that identification implies, cannot account for cases where the viewer's emotional attitude is at variance with that of the character. The problem with Carroll's overly literal construal of 'identification', however, is that it underplays the role of *imagination* in our emotional engagement with fictional characters. Carroll assumes that to 'identify' with a character is to assume all of his or her relevant attitudes, beliefs, traits and responses, which is far too demanding a conception of the term. On this view, call it 'strong identification', we are dealing with an empathising that encompasses a multitude of relevant aspects at once. Construed in this fashion, Carroll concludes that (strong) 'identification' is not only incoherent as a concept but also untenable as a description of our emotional engagement with film. We can address Carroll's criticism, however, by pointing out that 'identification' is typically concerned with imagining oneself in a character's situation, rather than as sharing precisely his or her affective and emotional responses. Such identification can be ambiguous and ambivalent; it may involve feeling sympathy for a character, but then again it may not (it is possible to identify with a character without feeling (much) sympathy for him or her, while one can also feel sympathy for a character with whom one does not identify). Moreover, as Gaut argues (2010: 258 ff), if we construe the process of identification as involving a plurality of aspects (perceptual identification, affective identification, epistemic identification and so on), which need not be activated all at once, then we can rehabilitate the term theoretically in a way that accords with the folk sense of 'identifying' with characters in film. All the same, it is clear that the concept suffers from a superfluity of distinct senses, and that there are many aspects involved in such processes of identification, which require further specification and explication than the concept of 'identification' generally affords.

Structures of Sympathy

Murray Smith has taken up this problem of providing a more differentiated conception of emotional engagement – what he calls the 'structure of sympathy' (1995: 81–86) – as an alternative to undifferentiated 'folk' as well as psychoanalytic concepts of identification. This model posits three levels of engagement that comprise the structure of sympathy: recognition, alignment and allegiance (Smith 1995: 81 ff.). According to Smith, *recognition* 'describes the spectator's construction of character', the way in which we individuate or pick out characters with definite characteristics and a coherent identity. For the most part, recognition occurs very readily in narrative film, being 'rapid and phenomenologically "automatic"' (1995: 82); yet there are cases where films block or undermine recognition such that the viewer struggles to identify a character as a coherent, individuated personage (Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977) or Lynch's *Inland Empire* (2006), for example). The second level, *alignment*, describes 'the process by which spectators are placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their actions, and to what they know and feel' (1995: 83). It refers to the way films focus attention on, and grant us knowledge of, a character via two related processes: *spatio-temporal attachment* (restricting the narrative to a character's actions) and *subjective access* (granting us access to the character's subjectivity) (Smith 1995: 83). POV shots are one common way of doing this, but there are many other devices used as well (POV shots, moreover, can also serve other ends, for example concealing the identity of a character in a horror film) (Smith 1995: 83–84). As I discuss below, there are important issues to be explored here concerning POV shots, cinematic emotion and imaginative engagement.

Finally, *allegiance* refers to 'the moral evaluation of characters by the spectator' (Smith 1995: 84). This refers to the way that various narrative, visual and aural cues grant us access to the character's state of mind, allow us to understand the context of his or her actions, and thus to morally evaluate the character on the basis of this knowledge and understanding (Smith 1995: 84). Taken together, recognition, alignment and allegiance comprise a 'structure of sympathy' that enables us to discriminate between levels of engagement. It can therefore help us to avoid the common confusion between alignment with a character's actions or state of mind and allegiance with the character from a moral-evaluative point of view. In Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), for example, we cannot be emotionally aligned with serial killer Buffalo Bill (his mental state remains a mystery), even though we at times share his point of view (watching, through his night vision goggles,

terrified Clarice Starling pointing her pistol blindly in the dark). We can, however, be aligned with Clarice (share her state of abject fear) and feel allegiance with her (finding her courage and determination morally admirable). Distinguishing between alignment and allegiance with characters, and how they may either overlap or conflict, is important for understanding narrative as well as appreciating a film's cinematic accomplishments.

In the Mood

Most cognitivist theories of emotion, narrative and genre tend to focus on character engagement, narrative content and the cognitive processes of film understanding. Carroll argues, for example, that we can explain the puzzle of emotional convergence in film – that viewers will typically respond in similar ways to particular movie scenes – by the 'criterial prefocusing' of narrative cues that ensure that the appropriate affective/emotional responses are elicited and directed (2008). Even theorists like Plantinga (2009a), who emphasise the interplay of cognitive, emotional and generic factors, still foreground the role of character, action and narrative content in their analyses of affective and emotional engagement with film.

One could object, however, that this approach overlooks the broader aesthetic and cinematic setting of narrative drama. It is not just character action and narrative content that elicit emotion but the entire repertoire of cinematic-aesthetic devices (lighting, composition, montage, rhythm, tempo, colour, texture, gesture, performance, music and sound). Emotions in movies are *aesthetically* elicited and communicated, not just cognitively identified and understood. Indeed, we can question some cognitivist theories for focusing exclusively on discrete (cognitively) focused emotions, rather than on the background aesthetic attunement elicited by particular sequences or even by the film as a whole. Movies do not simply present characters in discrete emotional states in order to convey narrative information. Rather, their aesthetic effect depends on the sensuous-affective background or encompassing 'mood' against which our complex flow of emotional responsiveness becomes manifest: the background against which we are able to recognise, align and ally ourselves with particular characters within specific narrative scenarios.

As an alternative to Carroll's 'criterial prefocusing' approach, Greg Smith (2003) has offered a different account of how film narrative works to achieve emotional engagement: namely by the complex evocation or cueing of

*mood*s rather than the triggering of discrete emotions based on objects or character alignment and allegiance. Indeed, 'the primary emotive effect' of cinema, Smith argues, 'is to create mood' (2003: 42). At the same time, mood cues the background affective dispositions that enable us to experience emotional engagement with characters in the narrative. More significantly, mood provides a sustained, low-level, indeterminate 'focusing' of affective attunement that is necessary for the successful 'convergence' of particular viewer's emotional responses to specific scenes or narrative sequences. Expressed differently, mood provides the (phenomenological) background of aesthetic attunement against which certain features of the narrative, character or situation can show up as salient, dramatically charged or emotionally significant. It is because of the mood of anxiety and tension artfully evoked in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) (through aural, visual and narrative cues) that the famous shower scene has such a powerful and dramatic effect. Consider the preceding 'parlour scene' between Marion and Norman sharing a sandwich, with its gloomy shadows, stuffed birds, stilted conversation, Norman's stammering speech, his denunciation of asylums and the minor musical background score; all of these elements contribute to cueing the relevant moods of anxiety and suspense that prepare for the famous shower scene that follows. It is because of the anticipatory moods of anxiety and suspense that her (morally) cleansing shower can suddenly switch into a watery death trap in such a viscerally shocking and emotionally devastating manner.

Smith's account suggests that we should consider a richer phenomenological approach to the ways in which emotions are keyed by mood or affective dispositions that serve to disclose the narrative world in particular ways. Mood attunes us to being receptive to specific emotional cues and thus to the particular responses of characters that thereby take on a heightened emotional significance. This approach is confirmed in recent studies of mimicry (the way in which individuals tend to mimic each other's affective or emotional responses), affective contagion (the phenomenon of group or shared affects, where individuals 'catch' the emotional responses of others), and the affective basis of intercorporeal recognition (the way our basic cognitive and psychological engagement with others is dependent upon affective responsiveness) (see Coplan 2006; Grodal 2009: 181–204; Laine 2011; Plantinga 2009a: 112–129; Smith 2003: 19–34). It also finds confirmation in the way in which narrative film uses a multiplicity of aesthetic elements and cinematic devices to cue mood in order to elicit and enhance the viewer's affective and emotional engagement.

Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000), for example, uses a haunting refrain, 'Yumeji's Theme' (composed by Shigeru Umabayashi), which accompanies the repeated gestures, poignant expressions and balletic movements of the main characters, the exquisitely elegant So Li-zhen [Maggie Cheung] and dashing Chow Mo-wan [Tony Leung]. The recurring use of this refrain, with its slow, sensuous sequences of everyday encounters between So Li-zhen [Cheung] and Chow Mo-wan [Leung], evokes the romantic moods of nostalgia and longing that make this poignant love story – achingly sustained but never actually consummated – so aesthetically charged and emotionally nuanced. The slowly unfolding temporal arc of the film is prepared by its subtle and sustained evocation of a variety of harmonically resonant moods. These moods are cued by Kar-wai's artful use of colour, décor, costume and music, and they are beautifully sustained by the graceful movements and repeated gestures of the characters as they sojourn through time and memory.

Another memorable mood sequence can be found in Almodóvar's *Talk to Her* (2002), a scene that Cavell might have described as a 'nothing shot'; an image or sequence that serves no particular narrative purpose other than to evoke an aesthetic charge or affective mood. There is a brief musical interlude in the course of the film that features a large gathering of people seated together for an artistic social gathering, listening to a performer (Caetano Veloso), accompanied by a guitarist and two cellists, singing a beautifully plaintive song (Cucurrucucu Paloma).[7] The scene, set in a delightful courtyard on a warm summer evening, lingers on the singer's performance, his expressive voice and features, the pleasure on the faces of the audience, including the lead characters. Everyone is enjoying the performance, which evokes a languorous ambience, a romantic mood, a poignant sensibility registered on Marco's [Mario Grandinetti's] melancholy face as he is moved, once again, to tears (a recurring motif in the film). The scene has little narrative significance other than as an occasion for Marco, the broken journalist, and Lydia [Rosario Flores], the broken matador, to talk, recalling painful memories of Marco's past relationship. He leaves the performance, overcome with emotion (as we have seen him do several times already), with Lydia following him, captivated by his overflowing feeling, thus opening a space for their uneasy intimacy to unfold. The scene is a mood-cue that uses music, song and our pleasure in performance to imbue the narrative situation with affective intensity. It expresses an aesthetic mood that celebrates the power and pleasure of performance, whether musical, dramatic or cinematic, for no particular narrative reason other than the aesthetic pleasure of watching narrative film.

In Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001), mood-cueing is no longer a background feature to guide our engagement with characters but a quasi-independent element within the cinematic world. In the 'Club Silencio' sequence, Betty [Naomi Watts] and 'Rita' [Laura Elena Harring] listen to an aching Spanish rendition of Roy Orbison's song 'Crying', a performance that turns out to be mimed, the singer [Rebekah del Rio] suddenly collapsing and 'dying' on stage. This extraordinary mood-evoking performance, however, also communicates an intuitive affective or aesthetic understanding to both characters and viewers (that we are witnessing a performance while in the grip of cinematic illusion; and that the characters' fantasised love affair is not real but illusory). More 'intellectualist' strains of cognitivist theory often overlook this complex cueing and evocation of mood, involving music, colour, visual patterning, gesture and performance. Yet it clearly plays a vital role in our aesthetic, imaginative and emotional engagement with narrative film.

Contemporary Cognitivism and Cinema

As I remarked at the beginning of this chapter, the broad field of 'cognitivist' approaches to cinema, which spans many theoretical perspectives, can be defined by its theoretical and methodological commitment to naturalistic theorisation and 'piecemeal' modes of inquiry (see Carroll 2008; Nannicelli and Taberham 2014; Plantinga 2018). It emerged as an alternative to the prevailing paradigms of film or screen theory – so-called 'Grand Theory' – that synthesised, often in an eclectic manner, semiotic, psychoanalytic and structuralist/poststructuralist theory and philosophy, while remaining committed to a critical (ethico-political) perspective on ideological structures rather than empirical or explanatory approach to theorising cinematic experience (Sinnerbrink 2011c: 13–27). Earlier generations of cognitivist theory were influenced by computational theories of mind as well as work on AI systems and empirical-experimental models (drawing on cognitive psychology and the neurosciences). This research programme has since broadened out to include evolutionary perspectives, bioculturalist models, multimodal, network, distributed as well as 4E (embodied, embedded, extended and enacted) theories of cognition (see Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2015; Nannicelli and Taberham 2014). As a naturalistic approach to theory – namely that all relevant processes pertaining to cinematic experience can

be explained in terms of natural causal processes as analysed within empirically grounded theories – cognitivism remains committed to providing explanatory (rather than descriptive or hermeneutic) forms of theory. In keeping with this commitment, cognitivists thus endeavour to produce causally explanatory theories of perception, cognition and emotional engagement with film, venturing also into questions concerning the aesthetics and ethics of cinema.

Contemporary cognitivists, however, reject the traditional dualism between reason and emotion, embodied versus mentalistic responses, exploring instead the interaction and dependency of these processes in our complex affective, emotional and cognitive engagement with moving images (Nannicelli and Taberham 2014). They not only focus on the role of 'top down' or higher-order cognitive processes (reflection, inference-making, hypothesising, practical reasoning) but on the important 'bottom-up' or lower-order embodied and affective processes involved in cognition that occur at sub-threshold, automatic or minimally conscious levels of awareness (physiological, corporeal, affective and emotional-cognitive 'priming' effects). Together these theories seek to provide explanatory accounts – drawing on empirical theory and research – to explain the causal processes, mechanisms and experiential components making up our complex experience of cinematic engagement. More recent cognitive work ventures into film aesthetics and ethics of film in order to apply cognitive theories and the neurosciences to account for the aesthetic effects of cinematic form as well as the moral significance of such forms in our engagement with audio-visual media (see D'Aloia and Eugeni 2014; Nannicelli and Taberham 2014; Plantinga 2018; Shimamura 2013; Smith 2018).

Two critical objections to cognitivist approaches have appeared in recent years, which both focus on topics central to the psychoanalytic-semiotic-poststructuralist paradigm of film theory (Sinnerbrink 2010). Can cognitivist approaches provide robust forms of critical interpretation/aesthetic evaluation of non-standard ('parametric') forms of cinema? (Call this the aesthetic or 'what about art film?' objection). And can cognitivist approaches account for the ideological-political effects of (popular) cinema? (The symptomatic or 'what about ideology?' objection). To take the first, cognitivist theories, from Bordwell and Carroll to Smith and Grodal, have offered powerful explanatory theories that deal well with canonical forms of popular narrative cinema. But how well do they deal with art cinema that eschews, for example, 'erotetic' (question and answer), cognitive puzzle-solving or PECMA (perception-emotion-cognition-motor action) flow models of

narrative engagement defining popular cinema? Cognitivist models of narrative theory may work convincingly for genre films like *Love Actually* (2003), *Transformers: The Last Knight* (2017) or *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021), critics may claim, but less well for 'parametric' narrative cinema like *Le quattro volte* (2010), *The Turin Horse* (2011) or *Memoria* (2021).

The second (the symptomatic objection) focuses on the question of cinema and ideology, asking whether cognitivist approaches, due to their commitments to scientific naturalism and empirical-scientific research, are adequately equipped to grapple with the ideological dimensions of film. Much of the work in so-called 'Grand Theory' – particularly feminist film theory and Marxist critical theory approaches – focused on the ideological structures shaping our engagement with (popular) cinema and the manner in which it can serve as a powerful vehicle of ideological influence, especially with regards to key aspects of personal identity (gender, 'race', class and so on). Can cognitivist theories engage with these ideological dimensions of cinematic experience without risking some version of the 'naturalistic fallacy'? It is important to explain the causal processes shaping general features of our affective, emotional and cognitive engagement with film; but we also need to address the question of how cinema contributes to the ideological context of contemporary cultural practices, moral discourses and social-political institutions.

We can respond to these two objections, the aesthetic and the ideological, by saying that they remain inconclusive; moreover, that they are countered by new work focusing precisely on film aesthetics and ethico-political questions (ideology). To be sure, there are important issues pertaining to how 'parametric' narrative films work, and how their particular aesthetic strategies thwart 'standard' models of cognitive engagement. And there are important questions concerning the ideological dimensions of cinema that film theorists, whether cognitivist or phenomenological, would do well to consider more directly and concretely. Here, however, we can point to various attempts by cognitivist theorists to address both 'art film' and ideology using the resources of cognitive theory. A number of theorists deal explicitly with non-standard forms of narrative cinema, including experimental cinema, from cognitivist, neuroaesthetic, even evolutionary biocultural perspectives (Grodal 2012; Shimamura 2013; Smith 2018). Their work shows how such approaches can provide us with the conceptual tools to undertake sophisticated and illuminating critical interpretation and aesthetic evaluation of challenging cinematic works. There are also attempts to tackle the ethico-political question of ideology in contemporary cinema

drawing on the work of cognitive theory and phenomenology (Plantinga 2018, 2019; Sinnerbrink 2019c; Stadler 2008). Such work seeks to account for how popular narrative film effectively captures audience attention and solicits moral-ideological allegiance via affective-emotional as well as cognitive-evaluative means (see Plantinga 2019 on Zack Snyder's *300*, for example). In short, both phenomenological and cognitivist approaches can be brought to bear on complex narratives and aesthetically challenging works as well as examining the mechanisms and effects that make possible the uptake of ideological meanings in our social-cultural engagement with contemporary media.

The 'Reductionism' Objection

Both of these objections reduce, so to speak, to versions of the 'standard' objection to cognitivist approaches, what we could call the *reductionism* objection: that cognitivist approaches, again due to their naturalistic commitments, risk offering 'reductive' accounts of relevant aesthetic elements pertinent to cinematic experience (the role of affect and mood, aesthetic experience, non-cognitive forms of engagement and so on). This rather broad and vague claim – it is not difficult to charge any theory with 'reductionism' given that most (piecemeal) theories target discrete phenomena or processes – can be broken down into two more specific claims. First, the claim that cognitivism ignores 'non-cognitive' affective processes that are central to cinematic experience, so is reductive in being 'too mentalistic' in its explanatory focus on 'higher-order' aspects of engaging with film. And second, the claim that there are phenomena relevant to cinematic experience that just resist cognitivist (naturalistic-explanatory) theorisation (the psychanalytic conception of the unconscious, for example), and so cognitivism is 'too rationalistic' in this respect. Such phenomena are taken as important to account for our experience of 'art cinema' or non-standard, parametric forms of narrative, so the challenge of art cinema remains.

In response, we can say that the first objection, once again, is countered by the rise of 'anti-mentalistic' accounts of affect, emotion and cognition. Although earlier forms of cognitivist theory tended to focus on higher-order 'top-down' forms of cognition, more recent approaches emphasise 'bottom-up' processes in order to provide a richer, more adequate account of affective-cognitive engagement (see Coplan 2006, 2011; Plantinga 2018; Plantinga and Tan 2007; Stadler 2008). The recent emphasis on embodied cognition

and on situated accounts of cognitive experience – acknowledging the essential role of social interaction, social-cultural learning, intersubjective communication, socio-cultural 'scripts' and enactive/interactive engagement with others in the world – brings cognitivist theory more into line with phenomenological perspectives (see Coegnarts 2017; Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2015; Fingerhut and Heinman 2017; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008). The second objection depends on the validity of the claims made concerning such phenomena as the Freudian/Lacanian unconscious, psychoanalytic accounts of repression, fantasy and the 'perverse' character of cinematic spectatorship. The danger here is that of conflating heuristic concepts with empirical phenomena, treating 'the unconscious' not as a heuristically useful notion to guide or generate theory, but as designating some putative empirical entity within the human psyche, and arguing that theories that fail to take this into account are failing to adequately describe, hence theorise, their object (see Sinnerbrink 2019c).

In short, both versions of the 'reductionism' objection (the too mentalistic/too rationalistic objections) are better understood as claims concerning the need to provide rich and complex phenomenological descriptive accounts of our objects of theoretical reflection. I would add that the charge of 'reductionism' is actually a claim about the need for an adequate phenomenology of the objects of cognitive theorisation. In other words, before we proceed with higher-order cognitive (naturalistic and explanatory) theory, we should first prepare the ground for such theorisation by ensuring we have an adequate phenomenological description of our object in order to better track its features and complexities. Such was the case with the (early) cognitive theorisation of emotion and neglect of mood (because mood did not fit the more intellectualist model of cognition, and was thus ignored because of its apparently 'non-cognitive' character). As I discuss next chapter, this suggests that phenomenology and cognitivism can, and indeed should, be brought together in a complementary, even synthetic manner. It also means that we should now consider phenomenological approaches to cinema as the other dominant current in contemporary film-philosophy.[8]

5

Body Double: Adventures in Phenomenology

Chapter Outline

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What is film phenomenology? As Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Julian Hanich remark, providing a coherent overview of film phenomenology is no easy task; it requires surveying a large and sprawling field, 'the contours of which seem to be as vague as the foggy landscapes in an Antonioni or Angelopoulos film' (Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich 2016: 1). One of the key challenges is simply defining what we mean by 'phenomenology': if the definition is overly broad (referring to any approach that focuses on subjective experience), then the term becomes so inclusive that even structuralist approaches can count as having a 'phenomenological' dimension. If the definition is too narrow or strict (as in Husserl's foundational descriptive science dedicated to articulating universal, invariant structures of consciousness via the method of the phenomenological reduction or *epoche* (bracketing) and detached 'eidetic' contemplation of 'essences' (*Wesensanchauung*)), then almost no film theory would count as properly phenomenological in a strict sense

(Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich 2016: 1). Here I strike a middle course, acknowledging that film phenomenology, on the one hand, refers a pluralistic set of theoretical approaches, foregrounding subjective embodied experience; that it is an essentially descriptive approach, moreover, focusing on detailed or 'thick' description, interpretation and analysis of relevant aspects of subjective cinematic experience. On the other, if phenomenology is to mean more than merely cataloguing one's personal or idiosyncratic impressions of a film, then it ought to aim at shared structures or common features of our embodied conscious engagement with cinema, providing a descriptively rich interpretation and analysis of features of subjective phenomena that can provide the basis for further (explanatory or contextualising) theorisation.

The relationship between phenomenology and film theory has, historically speaking, been rather halting and interrupted. With the exception of Merleau-Ponty's occasional essays and remarks dealing with film, 'classical' and existential phenomenologists (Husserl and Heidegger) generally ignored or dismissed it. Heidegger, for example, makes only a few remarks concerning cinema, equating it with photography as a representational medium that mechanically reproduces reality in image form as part of the reductive technological 'enframing' of being (see Sinnerbrink 2014a). Merleau-Ponty pens a famous essay dedicated to 'Film and the New Psychology', suggesting a productive parallel between cinema and phenomenology, and nominating cinema as a privileged medium for exploring mind-world relationships, but he does not go on to explore this connection much further. Sartre loved cinema, and even wrote a screenplay for the John Huston biopic, *Freud: The Secret Passion* (1962), but did not explicitly analyse cinema in his existential work, preferring literature (the novel and theatre) as the privileged artform for presenting and exploring consciousness and existential freedom. French phenomenology (drawing on Husserl and Heidegger but largely shaped by Merleau-Ponty and Sartre) was then brought to bear on film by theorists such as Amédée Ayfre, Henri Agel and Jean-Pierre Meunier, as well as individuals working within the interdisciplinary model of the *filmologie* movement (see Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich 2016; Hanich and Fairfax 2019). By the 1970s, however, their legacy was largely forgotten, despite attempts to stir interest in film phenomenology within the Anglophone world (see Andrew 1976: 242–253).[1]

In the Anglophone world, however, phenomenology gained traction only in the early-1990s to mid-2000s, thanks to Vivian Sobchack's groundbreaking work (1992, 2004) (with a contribution from Alan Casebier (1991)). As Frank Tomasulo remarks, in a prescient anticipatory discussion of the affinity between phenomenology and cinema studies:

> phenomenology is a method for studying any phenomenon: the world, the mind, or the cinema. Indeed, the cinema is a particularly apt subject for phenomenological investigation because it is so dependent on the explicitly visual experiences of time, space, perception, signification, and human subjectivity.
>
> Tomasulo 1990: 2

Tomasulo's special issue of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* on 'Film and Phenomenology' (1990) marks an important milestone in this story. In his Introduction, he identifies the value of phenomenology for theorising cinema, introducing Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology to the reader, offering a brief history of the French phenomenological film theory and the *Filmologie* movement, along with introducing the new work in this field by Casebier, Sobchack, Harold Stadler, Linda Singer and Gaylyn Studlar, who all feature in the special issue.[2] The philosophical motivation for the turn to phenomenology, according to Tomasulo, concerns the dual development in modernity to which Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists respond: 'the transformation of the world into a picture and the human being into a subject' (Tomasulo 1990: 3). Film and media theory, Tomasulo contends, struggling to move beyond a psychoanalytic-semiotic paradigm, and grappling with theoretical problems concerning subjectivity and (aesthetic) experience that poststructuralist 'critiques of the subject' sweep aside, might well find phenomenology an important alternative model of theorisation, especially concerning spectatorship and the subjective and embodied dimensions of cinematic experience.

With the publication of Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* in 1992, Tomasulo's claims were realised. Indeed, the impact of Sobchack's work has been profound, with an entire strain of contemporary film theory/philosophy of film drawing on and developing her work, and characterising itself broadly as 'phenomenological'. Sobchack's approach, adopted and radicalised by many of her followers, has always been eclectic, drawing on elements of Husserl but mostly based on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, combining concepts and approaches from both Merleau-Ponty's earlier (primacy of perception) and later (chiasmus and 'the flesh') phases of inquiry. This eclecticism has become a hallmark of contemporary film phenomenology. The latter not only draws on Merleau-Ponty but it often includes Deleuzian and occasionally cognitivist elements. For the most part, however, it has been shaped by the rise of 'affect theory' and Merleau-Pontian theories of embodiment (e.g. feminist phenomenology) as applied to spectatorship

(Barker 2009; Chamarette 2012, 2015; Ince 2013, 2017; Laine 2011, 2015; Lindner 2012; Marks 2000, 2002; Massumi 2015; Pisters 2012; Rutherford 2003, 2011; Shaviro 2010; Stadler 2011; Stephens 2012; Tuck 2011).

Within this eclecticism, which I shall discuss further below, it is worth noting two critical points. The first is the risk of conflating conventional and technical senses of 'phenomenology': on the one hand, the conventional sense of 'phenomenology' as providing broad, even personalist accounts of particular subjective experiential processes (describing the 'phenomenology' of our experience of watching a horror movie, for example). On the other, the more technical sense of 'phenomenology' as a thick description, hermeneutic interpretation and formal analysis of particular structural or essential aspects of consciousness, of embodied perception or of our shared 'being-in-the-world' (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger) (see Hanich and Ferencz-Flatz 2016). One can do the former without the latter (e.g. in analytic aesthetics) but also do the latter without engaging much in the former (in many 'affect theory' approaches to cinema, e.g. Shaviro 2010). This eclectic approach also runs the risk of offering first-person experiential 'evidence' as though this would suffice for phenomenological demonstration. One recurring complaint concerns the 'personalist' or 'impressionistic' tendencies of many phenomenological accounts of cinema, where the author's personal experience is taken as providing phenomenological 'evidence' justifying broader theoretical claims.[3] As Eugenie Brinkema observes, '[h]owever thrilling it may be to write and even read the personal accounts of any theorist's tremulous pleasures and shudderings, it is a signature of work on affectivity that must be resisted, for it tells us far more about being affected than about affects' (Brinkema 2014: 32).

It is worth recalling, however, that 'classical' phenomenology always aimed at invariant, *universal features* of consciousness; in recent film phenomenology, by contrast, there is typically a particularist focus on 'the body', affect, emotion, spectatorship, interpretation, evaluation, coupled with 'symptomatic' readings of film as reflecting these 'particularist' theoretical emphases (Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich 2016). Whatever its theoretical provenance, however, film phenomenology has always emphasised the importance of a descriptive account of situated but also differentiated experience of embodied spectators always already embedded within a meaningful social and historical world. It also focuses on corporeal, affective, aesthetic and 'ethical' aspects of film experience from a 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' point of view and does so with an acknowledgment of the role of social situatedness or active embeddedness within a pre-interpreted

world. The application of theoretical models, moreover, is typically subordinated to experiential description and interpretation, coupled with critical analysis and reflective evaluation of this experience.

The other related difficulty is the tendency to cite theoretical descriptions or accounts of experience as though this were to do phenomenology per se. Quoting Merleau-Ponty on perception or 'the flesh' and applying this theoretical interpretation to a film scene, however, is not the same thing as providing a thick phenomenological description or interpretative analysis of cinematic experience more generally. As remarked, contemporary film phenomenology is defined by diverse (and sometimes inconsistent) strands of modern thought: Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, Heidegger; (Deleuzian) affect theory; theories of corporeality, embodied spectatorship; aesthetics of 'touch' (hapticity); gender and queer theories, intersectional approaches, 'new materialisms' and so on (Chamarette 2012, 2015; Laine 2011; Rutherford 2011; Walton 2016).[4] Whatever the particular theoretical or practical commitments, however, it is worth noting that 'applying' a pre-existing theory or assumed concepts to an example or case study is *not* the same as practicing phenomenology in the proper sense. If nothing else, phenomenology maintains a commitment to some kind of theoretical 'bracketing' or suspension of presupposed theoretical concepts or frameworks in order to deal descriptively with phenomena or 'the things themselves', while remaining mindful of the partial and contextual (i.e. hermeneutic) conditions of possibility defining any kind of phenomenological investigation. At the same time, it is possible to find original theoretical elaboration of concepts accounting for cinematic experience in ways that are more than merely descriptive and which enable us to not only capture and comprehend but to critically reflect upon and transform our 'natural attitude' towards cinematic spectatorship.

The Phenomenological Turn: Sobchack's Contribution

It is hard to overestimate the scope and impact of Vivian Sobchack's contribution to philosophical film theory. Published in 1992, her groundbreaking study, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, introduced and developed a complex phenomenological account of spectatorial experience. As Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich point out, moreover, it extended phenomenological inquiry to the domain of cinematic experience

in ways that were original and productive (notably, the innovative idea of a 'film body'). Sobchack's turn to phenomenology – an eclectic combination of Husserlian intentionality coupled with Merleau-Ponty's account of embodied perception, the reversibility of perception and expression, and his later chiasmatic account of the intertwining of body and world via the 'flesh' – is motivated by a dissatisfaction with Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity and Marxist-structuralist theories of the 'apparatus'.[5] The latter theories constituted an imposing paradigm, still regnant in the early 1990s, encompassing 'subjective' and 'objective' poles of cinematic experience, construed as the always already manipulated and constructed effect of unconscious desire, processes of ideological interpellation, and power effects of ideological (state) apparatuses. Against the reifying effects of this 'Grand Theory' model, Sobchack called for a return to cinematic experience starting from the phenomenologically grounded claim that cinema, 'more than any other art of human communication', as she observes, 'makes itself sensuously and sensibly manifest as the expression of experience by experience (Sobchack 1992: 3). Echoing accounts of consciousness found in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack stresses the inherently reversible or relationally 'doubled' character of cinema. She articulates moving images as 'viewing views/viewed views' – that is, as both the *expression* of perception and the *perception* of expression, as both seeing and seen, hearing and heard – which is to say, cinema as reflecting the reflexive *relationality* of consciousness itself, enfolding viewer and film in a relationally reversible and reflexive whole. Instead of assuming a subject-object representational model of cinematic experience – a viewing subject positioned in relation to a detached world of represented objects – Sobchack proposes an intertwining of embodied mind and sensuously revealed cinematic world; a phenomenologically grounded model that articulates the reversible, relational and reflexive character of cinematic experience as a holistic phenomenon. Echoing a minor tradition of thinkers who have explored the film/mind parallel, Sobchack develops an original phenomenological model of cinematic experience that encompasses the simultaneous perception and expression of a moving image world in relation to an embodied and sensuously engaged viewer. What is more daring and original in her account, however, is to take the further step of suspending the distinction between viewer and film, replacing this implicitly dualistic model with a phenomenological reversible account of the embodied perception and cinematic body that together enfold the viewer in a synaesthetic and embodied form of immersive engagement.

Sobchack on Cinema as 'Viewing Views/Viewed Views'

Why turn to Merleau-Ponty for a phenomenology of film experience? For Sobchack the answer is twofold: 1) Merleau Ponty's emphasis on the 'primacy of perception', namely, that our cognitive experience is grounded in our perceptual engagement with the world. And 2) the 'reversibility' between perception and expression, subject and object – what the later Merleau-Ponty called 'the flesh', the relational 'intertwining' (or 'chiasm') of mind and world, our embodied experience of the sensuous texture of a meaningful world. For Merleau-Ponty, our perceptual engagement with the world provides the foundation for understanding and knowledge, including abstract theorisation. This means that we should begin phenomenology by describing our embodied perceptual experience, the intertwining of mind and world, in order restore the 'engaged knower' – or embodied viewer – to our ways of theorising cinematic experience. In this respect, art, and especially cinema, has a privileged role in revealing how embodied mind and sensuous world have a *reversible* relationship. As Merleau-Ponty remarks in 'Film and the New Psychology', film is 'peculiarly suited to make manifest the union of mind and body, mind and world, and the expression of one in the other' (1964: 58). Indeed, film seems to embody, according to Sobchack, this 'reversibility' between perception and expression. It offers a reversible or 'doubled' view, spanning 'subjective' and 'objective' poles, or what she calls a 'viewing view' and 'viewed view' combining perception and expression: 'A film is an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of … movement that makes itself … understood' (Sobchack 1992: 3–4).

Sobchack takes this claim as her phenomenological starting point, focusing on the 'lived-body' as the origin of cinematic modes of signification. She underlines the way film experience (the reversibility of perception and expression) is grounded in 'lived-body experience': 'the activity of embodied consciousness realising itself in the world and with others as both visual and visible, as both sense-making and sensible' (Sobchack 1992: 7). Her aim, more specifically, is to articulate, in phenomenological terms, the general structures of cinematic signification that 'always emerge particularly and contingently as the entailment of the lived-body and the world in cinematic acts of perception and expression' (Sobchack 1992: 8). This is a phenomenology of film experience, however, that not only aims to describe

and analyse our subjective embodied engagement with film but also articulates the 'reversible' or doubly perceptual-expressive character of moving images. We can grasp the latter as 'viewing views' and 'viewed views' that relate embodied viewer and film-world in a 'chiasmatic' or intertwined manner.

So what is our phenomenological experience of cinema? For Sobchack, it is a sensuous perception of an image-world: a *perception* that is also a *sense-making*; a *sensing* that is also a '*making sense* of' or understanding of what we perceive visually and aurally, but in ways that also engage our other senses synaesthetically (for example, touch). What are we 'making sense of' in film? From a phenomenological perspective, the images and sounds we encounter compose an image-world as viewed or revealed from (and even with) a particular point of view; the film experience is an immersive involvement in a meaningful world that addresses us as 'the expressed perception of an anonymous, yet present, "other"' (Sobchack 1992: 9). Again, Sobchack emphasises the point that viewer and film form *a whole*; I view the image-world of the film, where this image-world is also the 'perceived-expressed' of an anonymous 'other', a 'subject-world' that is the source of the 'viewing views' that we perceive.

As we shall see, Sobchack will take a further (indeed controversial) step in positing the film as perceiving-expressing itself in ways that correspond to our spectatorial embodied perception of the film-world. Here we encounter a well-known distinction that is given a decidedly phenomenological slant: that between *the eye/I* and *the camera* (or better *the film*, since we do not actually see a camera in (most) narrative films): *what I (my eyes) see of the film* and what the *camera/film 'sees' or shows us* in the film. We recognise here a phenomenological version of the problem of cinematic narrators that I discussed in Chapter 3, now articulated in relation to the film/world (rather than a narrator or narrative point of view) as 'source' of the intentionality (or expressive directedness) of the moving images we see. Sobchack emphasises, in this context, how there is a 'double seeing' that occurs in film experience: 1) *what I see in the film images*, or what is represented, and 2) *what the film shows*, or what is presented or 'seen' by it in showing certain images in certain ways to us. My embodied seeing (1) and what is 'seen' by the film (2) enter into a *reversible* exchange while remaining distinct. Sobchack articulates this relational intertwining of viewer and film via the notion of the 'viewing view/viewed view' but also, as I discuss presently, via the idea of a 'film body' (presumably as analogous to Merleau-Ponty's use of the concept of 'flesh' to describe the reversible relationality between embodied mind and sensuous world).

In the cinematic experience, 'we can see the seeing as well as the seen, hear the hearing as well as the heard, and feel the movement as well as see the moved' (Sobchack 1992: 10). At the risk of personification, we can describe this reversibility or exchange between my perception and the film's perception as the 'double seeing' of film: the interplay between *my seeing* and *what is seen* by the film. This 'double seeing' points to the shared 'language' of perception common to filmmaker, film and viewer. In this way, Sobchack argues that our perception of film parallels our perception of the world. There is a primordial *unity* between *perception* (the world as having sense) and *expressio*n (the way it appears as meaningful to us). Film theory forgets this unified experience of existence, fragmenting it into a theory of the image and an analysis of meaning or signification. It assumes, but passes over, the pre-theoretical lived experience of cinema – its doubled vision as both perceptual-expressive – that Sobchack's 'phenomenology of film experience' attempts to describe and articulate in a unified or holistic manner.

From an historical perspective, film theory, according to Sobchack, has tended to follow one of three approaches, defined by the familiar metaphors of the *picture frame*, the *window* and *the mirror* (1992: 14 ff.). These correspond to the well-known accounts of *realism* (window), *expressionism* or formalism (the frame) and the *modern reflexive film* (the mirror), which we could take as the 'synthesis' of these opposing poles, a 'self-conscious' reflection of (realist) perception and (significant) expression. The prevailing assumption of these ways of theorising film, however, is that we are dealing with the image as a static object: a rectangular 'framed' view related to an observing subject viewing a 'detached display' (to use Carroll's term). This relationship is subsequently theorised either in terms of cinematic perception (realism), or in terms of cinematic expression (expressionism/formalism, i.e. meaning-making).[6] Film theorists have therefore tried to 'synthesise' these two approaches, which has often resulted in conflating perception and expression: the distinction between them is collapsed and their reversibility ignored in ways that treat the viewing experience as detached and 'reflective' rather than embodied and immersive. Film theory, moreover, has tended to enshrine this approach by emphasising and promoting reflective theories that analysed the psychological and ideological mechanisms 'capturing' viewing subjects' consciousness and thereby manipulating the meanings that might be derived from the film (in psychoanalytic, linguistic/semiotic and neo-Marxist approaches).

The phenomenological character of the viewing experience played little role in such accounts. More recently, perceptual realism has been strongly

emphasised again in cognitivist film theory. The latter has superseded psychoanalytic and semiotic theories of ideological analysis in favour of empirical psychology and cognitive science, but has often done so at the expense of phenomenological description and hermeneutic analysis. Indeed, all of these approaches (psychoanalytic, semiotic analysis, cognitive theory) presume that we are dealing with a static object (the image) that is represented for an observing subject, but in doing so they ignore or downplay the *phenomenological character and basis* of our lived experience of moving images.

Film Body

Having outlined Sobchack's phenomenological account of the embodied experience of cinema and her critique of prevailing approaches in film theory, I turn to the more provocative dimension of her work, the fascinating but contentious notion of the 'film body'. Although contemporary film phenomenologists do not quote Sobchack's book in detail, the idea of the 'film body' has had an extraordinarily productive reception. Indeed, it has inspired recent accounts of the tactile or haptic quality of cinematic experience, focusing on affect in relation to the theorisation of the cutaneous character of the film body or even its dermic, musculoskeletal and visceral dimensions (see Barker 2009; Laine 2011, 2015; Marks 2000, 2002).[7] So what is the film body? Sobchack insists that it is not metaphorical but real: it refers to the *functional qualities* of a perceiving-expressive cinematic 'body' that includes both perceptual-expressive and material-technical aspects. Rather than talk of the 'film' or 'camera' as having expressive power and agential capacities, we can talk of the 'film's body' as intertwined with that of the embodied viewer, where both viewer and film are taken to be animated by, and responsive to, a cinematic intentionality, and where the notion of 'body' at issue is both functionalist and non-anthropomorphic.[8] Just as we can experience cinematic movement, compositional style and *mise-en-scène* as expressive of a (perceptual) point of view, so too we can take the film's body – encompassing both the material-technical dimension of the 'camera' and the perceptual-expressive dimension of moving images – as the source and agential focus of the images we experience when immersively engaged with a film-world.

What is novel but also controversial is Sobchack's claim that this functional and material-technical account is also expressive of an intentional consciousness; that the film's body is a way of describing a cinematic 'body-

subject' whose experiences become intertwined with ours when we watch a film. As she writes:

> Not only was the film seen to implicate an objective (if generally invisible) body – an instrumentality through which the *visible behaviour* of an intending consciousness is expressed; it was seen also to implicate a visual body-subject, an agent who autonomously, introceptively, and visibly perceives the *visual behaviour* of others ... The film is not, therefore, merely an object for perception and expression; it is also the subject of perception and expression.
> Sobchack 1992: 167

Here again Sobchack is referring to moving images as deriving from, and expressing, an 'embodied' agential point of view ascribed neither to a character, narrator or 'camera'/director, but rather to the ensemble of relations – perceptual, expressive, technical and embodied – defining, so to speak, the film-spectator assemblage.

As remarked, we recognise here a similar issue that arose in the context of cinematic narration, where successive models of explicit narrator, implied narrator and 'film itself' as expressing an impersonal narrative point of view were explored (see Chapter 3). Sobchack's account differs in attributing a functional material-technical body and perceptual-expressive intentionality to the 'film itself' such that it can be itself regarded as a materially embodied 'quasi-subject'. The film itself, in short, is 'the intentional "terminus" of an embodied and seeing subject, as an intentional activity irreducibly correlated with an intentional object' (Sobchack 1992: 204). In other words, we can describe film or cinema as a relational structural whole that links the embodied perceiving viewer with a perceptual-expressive film-world via the technical mediation of the cinematic apparatus. Why not simply describe the film itself as the presentation of a 'narrative perspective' or, more conventionally, as the expression of the director/filmmakers' vision? Sobchack's response is to stress, on phenomenological grounds, that we do not actually perceive any such 'narrator' or camera or the director/filmmaker (unless they appear as 'characters' or personages within the film), hence we should not posit them as part of the ensemble of 'functional' relations constituting film's body. Rather, we should 'bracket' these presuppositions and focus on the quasi-independent world of the film as integrating the viewer into a relational whole. Within the latter, moving images are regarded as both viewing views (perception) and viewed views (expression) that together constitute a correlational structural whole (the 'film body').

From this point of view, the primary function of the technological aspect of the film's body is 'to enable *acts* of introceptive perception and their

expression'; that is, to animate embodied perception and existential expression or lived meaning primarily through movement, whether expressed within, between or across moving images (Sobchack 1992: 205–206). Sobchack sides here with those other philosophers of film who take the movement in moving images to be *real* movement – from a phenomenological point of view – despite the 'artificial' or illusory manner by which such images are mechanically or technically produced (Sobchack 1992: 207–208). She also aligns her phenomenological account with those philosophers who have sought to articulate the nature of the film/mind analogy, albeit understood here in the sense of the film body's embodied perception and imagination (Sobchack 1992: 209 ff.), where zooms and tracking shots are taken to be expressive of forms of perceptual attention, motility and awareness.[9] Once again, however, the emphasis falls on the 'bodily' aspect of this experientially immersive mode of engagement. Instead of a 'film-world' being selectively shown or revealed from an impersonal narrative point of view, we have an embodied 'film-subject' (implicitly embedded within a film-world) whose perceptual-expressive intentionality animates and 'directs' (in both ordinary and technical senses) the sense, order, style and meaning of the images we experience together.

How might such an approach work in practice? Sobchack's one extended case study is a long and complex discussion of the film-noir crime drama, *The Lady in the Lake* (Montgomery 1946), which, as Sobchack remarks, 'has become the paradigm for posing the hermeneutic problem of the film's body' (1992: 230). The film's (infamous) attempt to present the narrative entirely from the embodied viewpoint of the protagonist Philip Marlowe (Robert Montgomerey), is often cited as an example demonstrating the 'impossibility' of presenting a direct embodied point of view perspective in cinema (where traditional point of view shots are generally treated as an imaginative approximation). The famous 'failure' of the experiment to present an embodied subjective point of view only serves to underline the artefactual, non-veridical character of cinematic point of view (namely, that it involves *approximated* forms of perceptual and cognitive perspective-taking that at the same time involve *imaginative* projection and fictional construction). Sobchack's claim is that the anomalous character of the film is due to its offering a direct presentation of the perceptual activities and expressive qualities of the *film body* that are attributed to *a single individual* with his own embodied consciousness or singular point of view. At the same time, this individual (Philip Marlowe) is presented as having a dominant perceptual perspective on the world, but one in which the simultaneous

'objective' or object-like character of his embodiment (how one appears from the viewpoint of the Other) is presented only partially and indirectly (e.g., through mirror reflection shots). The confusion here between the film body and the body of a single human protagonist is at the core of the 'hermeneutic problem' of the film: whose or what perspective are we seeing, when not all that we see in a film-world can be attributed to one character alone? Consider the frustrating viewing experience of trundling along with the camera/Marlowe as he 'walks' into an office, addresses a secretary, walks to another door, reads the sign, turns the knob, enters the office of a crime story editor. We see her face as he talks with her, as she lights a cigarette, and then follow his gaze as he visually tracks the secretary who enters then leaves the office, gazing back at him in turn, as he then continues his conversation with the editor, who wryly comments on his wandering attention – all in one continuous long take. For Sobchack, this conflation of film body and protagonist's body is the fundamental cause of the 'strange discomfort, alienation, and disbelief experienced by the film's spectator' (1992: 231). The incongruencies evident in one's experience of *The Lady in the Lake*, which have prompted the ire of many critics (Sobchack cites Bordwell, Amengual, Branigan and Mitry, among others), point to the disjunction between human perceptual experience and cinematic perceptual expression, or between our bodies and the film body. In this respect, the film offers a 'negative' case study in distinguishing the film body from human embodied perception, and the manner in which the intelligibility of cinematic expression differs from human perceptual experience.[10]

At the same time, Sobchack's description of the film body, despite its apparent differences from human perception, cannot help but be understood on analogy with human embodied perception, even as it distinguishes itself from it (what other model could we use?). Moreover, the phenomenological character of Sobchack's analyses, which in keeping with phenomenological method are rooted in the description and analysis of subjective or lived (human) experience, cannot be readily applied to the 'experience' of the film body except insofar as the latter is experienced, on analogy with, and from the perspective of, a (human) film spectator. Apart from the 'impossible' points of view readily available in cinema (say, a shot of a spaceship hurtling through the void), the experientially 'owned' and perspectivally 'positioned' film-subject's 'perception' cannot but be rendered through an anthropocentric frame. Much like Kant's 'thing in itself' or being/reality as it is independent of any human perspective, a purely 'non-human' perspective on 'the world' (itself only intelligible in human terms, in the ways that Heidegger showed) is an

intellectual abstraction (hence inextricably related to our capacity for thought) rather than a phenomenological experience. Much like her example of *The Lady in the Lake*, the merging of film body and embodied perception creates difficulties for Sobchack's phenomenological model of the cinematic experience. One major difficulty is that the concept of the 'film body' appears to be imported and imposed on film experience, rather than being derived from describing and analysing the 'film's own experience' in phenomenological terms, which would be an impossibility.[11] Phenomenological method requires a bracketing of theoretical abstractions and conceptual presuppositions, in order to allow the phenomena and their underlying structures to be described, interpreted and analysed. Applying a theoretical concept – or as I suggest below, a productive heuristic – to the phenomenological experience of cinema is to violate one of the fundamental precepts of the phenomenological method. Indeed, one could apply the whole problematic of the Other here to the putative 'film-subject', whose perception or experiential 'point of view' cannot but help be thought from the 'egoistic' perspective (in the Husserlian sense) of a human subject.[12]

Frampton's 'Filmind'

Daniel Frampton's (2006) concept of the 'filmind' extends but also inverts Sobchack's emphasis on the 'film-body', adapting elements of her phenomenological approach to the cinematic experience but also criticising her phenomenological model as too anthropocentric. On the one hand, Frampton models the cinematic thinking expressed by the film – and described in non-technical terminology attributed to the film – as though it belonged to a quasi-human (embodied) subject. On the other, Frampton resists any such attribution of 'anthropocentric' thinking and takes the radical step of doing away with the functional-material aspect of Sobchack's 'film-body' with its phenomenological grounding in the lived (embodied) experience of the spectator. Instead, he posits a 'filmind' – an intending mind that organises its thought-images into a coherent film-world – as both source and object of the filmgoer's immersive aesthetic experience of the film[13] (an account that is curiously neglectful of the role of *imagination* in cinematic engagement). At the same time, Frampton's approach draws on the history of philosophical reflections on film. Figures both well-known (like Eisenstein, Cavell, Deleuze) and obscure (like the 'mysterious early French theorist Yhcam' (Frampton 2006: 3)) are assembled in a novel genealogy of film-philosophy, focusing on

the various attempts to draw parallels between, or sometimes even equate, film and thinking. As Frampton points out, from its inception film has been compared with the mind, 'whether through analogy with human perception, dreams or the subconscious' (2006: 15). Film has been understood, for example, as 'a recording of the brain (Edward Small, Parker Tyler), a visualisation of our thoughts and memories (Henri Bergson, Germaine Dulac, Pierre Quesnoy), or similar in form to our subconscious (Emile Vuillermoz, Ricciotto Canudo)' (2006: 16). Others have explored how film depicts the subjectivity of characters' thoughts (Antonin Artaud, Bruce Kawin), whether film is a 'subjective' or 'objective' medium (Hugo Münsterberg), or how film might in fact reveal a unique form of cinematic thought (Jean Epstein, Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, Béla Balázs) (Frampton 2006: 16).

While Frampton draws inspiration from these approaches, he criticises the fundamental *anthropomorphism* of the film-mind parallel. Film-thinking, he argues, is modelled on human thought (which restricts what can be shown by means of image, sound and narrative), while film images and image sequences are modelled on human perception (a questionable parallel, since film editing and standard tracking shots, midshots or closeups, for example, do not correspond with bodily locomotive or visual saccadic movements). Instead, Frampton proposes, we should consider whether film has its own unique kind of thinking, which is poetic, affective and intuitive but also expressive of an 'organic intelligence'. This would be a 'film thinking' that provides, he claims, a more appropriate form of phenomenological description that better captures our lived experience of cinema. Several questions arise at this point. If not on analogy with human thought, on what is film-thinking modelled? What is this thinking about? Who or what is doing the thinking?

Frampton's responses to these questions are striking and original. Film-thinking is thinking concerning a *film-world*: a virtual cinematic reality with its own rules and consistency. Film does not simply reproduce reality, as per representationalist theories; rather, Frampton claims, film constitutes 'its own intentions and creativities. Cinema is the projection, screening, showing, of *thoughts of the real*' (2006: 5). How to conceptualise the composition of film? Frampton's response is that we should posit the viewed film-world as the creation of a *filmind* that is the (non-human) intending agency animating, deciding and organising the film's various cinematic, aesthetic and dramatic elements. The 'source' of the film's sounds and images is no longer an *auteur*, or the apparatus, or a putative *grand imagier* (George Wilson) but rather the intending filmind. Why not posit the director/filmmaker as source of the

film's images, or else construe them as providing impersonal narrative perspectives or points of view? The phenomenological answer, as with Sobchack, is that this is to impose an external theoretical construction on the immersive experience of film, and furthermore, this entrenches the 'anthropocentric' model of conceptualising film experience that privileges human perception and experience in ways that blind us to the novel experience of cinema. Instead of narratological models (which cannot account for the creation of film-worlds) or phenomenological approaches (which tend to model film too strictly in terms of human perception), Frampton's filmosophy posits a filmind as part of 'an organic philosophy of film' (2006: 7). Experientially open filmgoers – rather than passive 'spectators', deaf 'viewers' or overly literary 'readers' – are thus encouraged to take up the filmosophical perspective in order to better articulate their multifarious experiences of film.

As remarked, Frampton draws on Sobchack's phenomenological approach, but is also inspired by Deleuze's provocative reflections on cinema and thought; not only in the sense that there can be cinematic 'thought-images' (as in Hitchcock's work) but also that cinema – especially in experimental and modernist film – is capable of enacting a 'shock to thought', a provocation to think. He also takes a strongly critical stance on prevailing analytic-cognitivist and narrativist approaches to cinema. The former, Frampton argues, is too rationalistic and thus loses sight of the aesthetic dimensions and broader cultural point of film; the latter is too reductivist as well as insensitive to the cinema's visual, aural and temporal aspects. Such a critique creates the expectation that Frampton's own reflections on particular films will showcase the aesthetic acumen and philosophical cogency of his filmosophical approach. Because of its avoidance of technicist and hermeneutic discourse, however, Frampton's filmosophical interpretation ends up being impressionistic and quasi-formalistic, offering brief descriptive accounts that eschew narrative content or stylistic analyses.[14] As we shall see, phenomenological approaches thereby run the risk of offering formalist and impressionistic, overly subjectivised or personified accounts (which attribute affect to the film itself).[15]

In the case of both Frampton and Sobchack, however, we can ask at what point phenomenological description gives way to theoretical imposition. To describe, as Sobchack does, the experiential ensemble composed by the spectator and moving images nexus as a 'film-body' is to provide a rich and illuminating theoretical heuristic that can help us conceptualise and understand the phenomenological character of spectatorial experience. That is not the same thing, however, as positing, on phenomenological grounds, that there

really is a film-body or cinematic 'body-subject' whose experiential perception and agential intentionality is actually animating and giving meaning to the film. As remarked, both Sobchack and Frampton adopt a phenomenological descriptive-interpretative approach to conceptualising cinematic experience; at the same time, they apply heuristic concepts or theoretical frameworks (the concept of the 'film body' or theses concerning cinema and thought) to these experiences, which risks violating the phenomenological injunction to bracket theoretical presuppositions and focus on descriptive analyses and evaluative interpretation. This brings us to the key objections that critics have traditionally raised against phenomenological approaches, and the ways in which we might critically respond to such critiques in order to defend and refine how we should understand film-phenomenology and put it into practice.

Phenomenology: Two Problems of Subjectivism

The 'classic' objection to or difficulty facing phenomenological approaches, whether in pure or applied terms, is that of *subjectivism*: the privileging of and focus on first-person perspectives inevitably raises the question of the warrant or justification of the theoretical claims made on the basis of a descriptive account of such experience. It also raises questions about how far phenomenological approaches can acknowledge the role of contextual (social, cultural and historical) factors. Phenomenological approaches are essentially descriptive but include both interpretation and analysis of subjective phenomena, aiming to reveal their shared structures and communicable meanings. This suggests that phenomenology is particularly suited to illuminating our aesthetic experience of film but not well suited to providing explanatory accounts of the causal processes underlying such experience.

Two related issues are raised as criticisms of phenomenological approaches to cinematic experience. The first is the charge of *aesthetic subjectivism*: offering a personal, first-person subjective (aesthetic) response as providing evidence supporting interpretative or even theoretical claims. We do of course experience cinema from a first-person perspective but one's own idiosyncratic responses do not provide, of themselves, adequate evidence supporting stronger theoretical claims (and only a moderate basis for aesthetic claims). The second is *epistemic subjectivism*: the use of anecdotal ('just so'/ad hoc) evidence to support theoretical claims, without offering adequate conceptual

argumentation or theoretical justification. In some cases, this can be compounded by a dogmatic reliance on presupposed theoretical or conceptual frameworks, which clearly violates, as remarked, one of the cardinal precepts of phenomenological inquiry (encapsulated in Husserl's motto, 'to the things themselves!'). Because phenomenology is focused on a descriptive account of subjectivity, it inevitably courts the risk of subjectivism, whether aesthetic or epistemic, which is why phenomenologists have insisted on the anchoring of phenomenology in shared 'universal' structures or features of human consciousness or 'being-in-the-world'. Phenomenological descriptive theory provides the basis for all sorts of theorisation but does not constitute an explanatory theoretical account in its own right.

Indeed, as a corollary to these twin charges of subjectivism, there is the related risk of reverting to speculative theory, which arises when one makes 'theoretical' claims based solely on phenomenological evidence. As remarked, the use of heuristics and conceptual-metaphorical models ('cinema as brain', 'skin of the film', the 'filmind') can guide theoretical practice in an illuminating way; but such practices do not themselves constitute theoretical claims in the strong sense supported by empirical evidence. Rather, the heuristic use of guiding metaphors/concepts for the purpose of generating, developing and transforming theoretical problems and debates soon becomes speculative and ungrounded if taken as part of a theoretical model with explanatory aims.

Two Responses to Subjectivism: Projection and Distribution

Film theorists influenced by phenomenology implicitly recognise the problem of subjectivism, but generally reject the classical phenomenological response of focusing on the disclosure of shared 'structures of consciousness' (Husserl) or 'existential structures' of Dasein or being-in-the-world (Heidegger). Instead, alternative strategies have emerged in order to deal with this problem, what we could call the *projection* and *distribution* responses. We can 'desubjectify' affects – lived bodily responses to the affordances of our world – by *projecting* them onto non-human objects, events or environmental states of affairs. Deleuzian affect theory, for example, drawing on a distinctive conception of affect deriving from Spinoza, Bergson and Nietzsche – where affect is defined impersonally in relation to bodily

capacities to affect and be affected, the differential and relational variation of bodily intensities – projects affect beyond the 'subjective' sphere such that objects, landscapes and even nature itself can be described as expressing 'affect' in this corporeal-relational sense (see Boljkovac 2013; Del Rio 2008; Shaviro 2010).

In a related manner, we can also *distribute* these affective states across a plurality of related objects, creating a 'distributed' or pluralised affective state encompassing a relationally defined composite body. Accordingly, shared affects are no longer primarily 'subjective' but dispersed or distributed across a range of different bodies forming a relational composite whole. On this account, affects are no longer defined primarily in relation to the experiencing human subject but as 'desubjectified', free-floating intensities attributable to, or expressed by, the 'assemblages' formed by human and non-human bodies, artefacts, things and objects, natural environments and so on (Massumi 2015; Shaviro 2010). They can even be attributed to, and expressed by, film form itself, independently of any putative anchoring of affects in a 'body', whether corporeal or 'filmic' (Brinkema 2014). This projective-distributive approach attributes affective states encompassing a plurality of related objects and bodies, creating 'shared' affects that are distributed across different bodies, and escaping subjectivism via heterogeneous, distributed forms of affective expression.

Recent versions of this approach echo the idea of distributed cognition; they posit an embodied response to moving images projected/distributed so as to incorporate the film itself, deploying, for example, the ideas of a 'film body', 'filmind', 'skin of the film' or disembodied affects constituted by and expressed as cinematic form (Brinkema 2014; Del Rio 2008, 2016; Frampton 2006; Marks 2000, 2002). Brinkema (2014), for example, goes further than Sobchack's 'film-body', Marks' 'skin of the film' or Barker's 'tactile eye', and does away with the link between affects and the (human) body altogether. Rather, she posits affect as the self-referential expression of form that is attributed to the 'film itself', understood as a configuration of textual form, rather than being attributable to any embodied viewing subject or putative filmic body. In a remarkably bold claim, she posits that affects just are disembodied, non-subjective, self-referential expressive forms:

> Affect, as I theorize it here, has fully shed the subject, but my argument goes a step further and also loses for affects the body and bodies. This book regards any individual affect as a self-folding exteriority that manifests in, as, and with textual form.
>
> Brinkema 2014: 25

The result, however, is a conflation of affect as a human dispositional response and affect as an expressive quality of works of art. Or, to use Carl Plantinga's (2012) terminology, it risks blurring the distinction between human moods and art moods, which are distinct but complementary ways of understanding affect and mood in cinema (the expressive qualities of the film-world can be described as having a certain mood or affective quality, which is distinct from, but complements, the affective states of characters). In Brinkema's radically 'autonomous' conception of affect, however, human moods or subjective affective states are attributed to the images or formal-compositional structures of the film itself. The result is an extreme projection and automisation of affect, now construed not only as 'textual form' but as intentional quasi-subject: 'Thus, it is not a knee-weakened subject who grieves but an undialectical image through which the dimension of grief moves as something that is painful *for form*' (Brinkema 2014: 93). As Dominic Lash asks, what does it mean to say that a sequence is 'painful *for form*'? (2018: 2) We could take this as a metaphorical attribution of pain to the film itself, perhaps as an expression of background mood of grief and suffering that accentuates the grief of a character or the sympathetic response of the spectator. As Hanich observes, perhaps Brinkema's approach echoes, but also radicalises, that of Susanne Langer, for whom there is 'a *similarity* between the dynamics of an art form and the dynamics of emotional life' (2015: 114). As Hanich remarks, however, Brinkema's postulation of affect as the autonomous expression of form goes much further:

> She does not only maintain that filmic structures resemble the structures of affects – she maintains that *specific* filmic structures resemble *specific* affects like joy or disgust. And even this formulation does not exhaust her intervention. She even claims that certain filmic structures *are* these affects. Or, to put it differently, the way a certain film is structured *is* an affect itself.
>
> Hanich 2015: 114

Taken at face value, these are contentious claims: affect is no longer understood as a subjective bodily state, or as an expression of feeling, atmosphere or mood designed for aesthetic effect, but rather as the aesthetic manifestation of (textual) form. On the other hand, we could take this claim as a productive heuristic, treating 'affect' metaphorically and impersonally as though it were a qualitative aesthetic feature directly manifested via cinematic (or 'textual') form, precisely in order to allow us to reconceptualise affect so as to emphasise its relationship to the formal aesthetic features of cinema. To engage in metacinematic 'pathetic fallacy' as an intentional use of a productive

heuristic, however, is something quite different from claiming that form itself has or is an affect (that it 'grieves'). Much like Frampton, the result is to offer deconstructivist analyses of film sequences that bracket or suspend narrative content, character situation and contextual meaning in favour of a radically formalist and metaphysically speculative account of 'autonomous' affects expressing the (presumed) intentionality/subjectivity/agency of the 'film itself'.[16]

As critics argue, however, it is not clear what is to be gained by such speculative and hyperbolic claims, which personify or 'facialise' the film 'prosopopoeiacally' (via personification); that is, by projecting and attributing affective states to it in ways that bracket or ignore more obvious forms of narrative meaning (and subjective spectator responses to the latter). However suggestive and illuminating these theoretical speculations may be, they are heuristic forms of theorisation that draw on phenomenological techniques and suggestive metaphorical models in order to help us rethink how we conceptualise cinematic experience. They do not constitute, however, either a 'phenomenological' descriptive account of subjective experience (since they are applying presupposed theoretical ideas) or a theoretical explanatory account of the processes underlying such experience (since they purport to revise and reconceptualise such experience), however much theorists may insist that they do.

Bringing Phenomenology and Cognitivism Together

A common source of theoretical confusion and misunderstanding in contemporary philosophy of film concerns the different methodologies that film phenomenologists and cinematic cognitivists draw upon. We could roughly describe these as descriptive/experiential versus empirical/explanatory approaches. The role of heuristic strategies or reasoning protocols, which can include the use of cognitive shortcuts, illuminating analogies, synthetic concepts, hypothetical thought experiments or productive metaphors, differ widely in these two approaches. By theoretical heuristics, I mean exploratory ideas or theoretical framing perspectives that can enable us to 'see' or articulate a phenomenon more clearly, make theoretical or conceptual connections, draw productive parallels, test theoretical or empirical claims, including counterexamples, compare competing perspectives, or develop theories

creatively and critically. The idea of the mind/brain as an information-processing device (computer) or of cinema as a phenomenologically articulated 'film-body' are two influential theoretical heuristics in philosophical film theory that have enabled productive inquiry but have also generated certain theoretical confusions. For every productive connection or insight gained thanks to a suggestive parallel or analogy, however, there are also misleading inferences and deceptive disanalogies that we need to take into account in our philosophical work with film.

This means that we need to be methodologically reflective or self-critical in our use of theoretical heuristics, being mindful of the temptation to take them to designate empirical realities or provide theoretical evidence (neither of which they necessarily do). The mind/brain differs in many ways from a computer (computers are neither embodied nor socially, culturally and historically embedded, for example, a point that both phenomenologists and 4E cognitive theorists take seriously). The 'film-body', like our own bodies, is embedded within a relational world articulated through practical engagements and shaped by shared horizons of meaning. This is an aspect curiously underplayed in most haptic or 'embodied' modes of phenomenological film theory, which assume a 'world-poor' approach to their descriptions of cinematic engagement, focusing on the subpersonal level of corporeal affective responses but paying little attention to the dramatic, contextual, and aesthetic features of a cinematic world – or its narrative events – to which such responses are due.

Both phenomenological and cognitivist approaches use heuristics that are productive and useful for practices of film theorisation, but they would also benefit from further critical self-reflection on the methodological and epistemic benefits and drawbacks of using such devices as ways of bootstrapping the construction of theories. We should remain mindful of the methodological need to combine 'thick' description of phenomena with empirical explanatory accounts of the causal processes underlying these phenomena. It is important to acknowledge the productive role of theoretical heuristics and heuristic perspectives, but also not to confuse heuristic approaches or devices with descriptive or explanatory approaches as such.

What this suggests is the need to develop adequate descriptive and explanatory accounts of cinematic experience if we are to do justice to its complex character.[17] A dialectical approach – identifying limitations or inadequacies in existing theoretical models and supplementing or correcting these by way of synthetic theory construction – offers one way to combine phenomenological and cognitivist approaches in order to better describe and track, interpret and analyse, conceptualise and explain diverse but

related dimensions of cinematic experience. This would enable us to develop descriptively rich and empirically grounded explanatory models of the relevant aesthetic and ethical aspects of cinematic engagement. To do this, however, would require theoretical reflection on the methodological characteristics and theoretical specificities of heuristic, descriptive and explanatory modes of theory. It also demands theoretical vigilance to avoid conflating levels or types of theoretical inquiry, to avoid theoretical reductionism, and to avoid the temptations of speculative 'pseudo-theory'. What we might call a 'dialectical synthetic' approach offers the possibility of combining 'thick' phenomenological description of cinematic works and aesthetic experience with empirically grounded, cognitivist explanatory accounts of the causal processes behind such phenomena (see Sinnerbrink 2019c). There is a productive and exciting space of interdisciplinary inquiry opening up where the attention to subjective experience, aesthetic engagement and the close analysis of form intersects with theoretical models of explanation grounded in empirical research. In this way, we can do justice to both the experiential and aesthetic richness and complexity of cinema and offer explanatory models that promise to make modest but important contributions to explaining how these works achieve their powerful aesthetic and ethical effects.

6

Bande à part: Deleuze's Cine-Philosophy

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One important question less addressed in either phenomenological or cognitivist approaches is *why* film matters to us. What is at stake in our aesthetic engagement with film? Is film just a clever cognitive puzzle to amuse a distracted public? Or a stimulating aesthetic way of thinking about embodiment? Or a way for philosophers to argue about ethics? Can films respond to cultural anxieties or existential concerns? Can cinema deal with philosophical issues such as scepticism and nihilism? These are some of the deeper questions animating the projects of Gilles Deleuze and Stanley Cavell, two of the most important and influential of film-philosophers. If Bordwell and Carroll are the founders of the analytic-cognitivist approach, Cavell and Deleuze are paragons of the film-philosophy approach.

What they share, beneath superficial differences, is a concern with *why* film matters philosophically. Their responses take different but related paths. For Deleuze, (modern) cinema is a way of inventing reasons 'to believe in this world', a response to the problem of philosophical *nihilism* via the invention of new images (like the time-image). For Cavell, film is an implicit response to epistemic and moral *scepticism* that enacts a retrieval of the ordinary, and thus provides an image for what philosophy strives to overcome but also sometimes struggles to express. To be sure, scepticism and nihilism differ in certain ways (scepticism about knowledge of reality or the subjectivity of the Other does not always entail nihilism, whereas nihilism can encompass not only philosophical critiques of morality but forms of moralism that remain independent of moral scepticism). Nonetheless, cinema is philosophical, for Deleuze and Cavell, because of the ways in which it can respond to the problems of nihilism and scepticism, and the manner in which it can revalue the ordinary, question our settled beliefs and foster the creation of new perspectives or modes of existence.

Rather than presenting a detailed philosophical commentary on Deleuze and Cavell's respective projects, of which there are many excellent examples (see Deamer 2016; Rodowick 1997; Rothman and Keane 2000; Shaw 2019; Wheatley 2019), in the following two chapters I shall explore their overlapping responses, at once creative and critical, to the related philosophical and cultural problems of nihilism and scepticism, both of which concern different dimensions of the crisis of meaning. In particular, I shall focus on how film can contribute to philosophical thinking, exploring how Deleuze's cine-philosophy addresses problems that are both metaphysical and moral, above all the problem of nihilism and the need for 'belief in the world'. Deleuze will claim that such problems can be thought through in cinematic terms, expressed through movement- and time-images, which thereby offer new ways of rethinking and reanimating the problems of movement and time, of nihilism and belief, and the relationship between thought and images.

Deleuze's Cine-Philosophy

The primary philosophical inspiration behind Deleuze's *Cinema* books is the French vitalist philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson's metaphysics of life and of time understood as *duration* [*durée*], and his philosophy of matter (conceived as co-extensive with images) and memory (conceived as

accessing different layers of time) provides a metaphysical and conceptual framework for Deleuze's cinematic philosophy (or cine-philosophy).[1] Deleuze adapts Bergson's vitalist 'process metaphysics' of movement and time and develops a novel philosophical typology and analysis of cinematic movement. He also brings to cinema a Peircean semiotics (rather than Saussurean semiology), an approach that yields a complex typology of movement-images (and time-images) that compose cinematic narratives as open-ended wholes.[2] This account of cinema applies whether we are dealing with movement-image narratives governed by a 'sensory-motor schema' linking perception, affection and action or with a 'crystalline' regime of time-image narrative, constituted, as I discuss further, through non-localised links, 'irrational' cuts, disparate temporal flows and aberrant movements. Deleuze adopts three central theses from Bergson's process metaphysics that emphasise the primacy of movement (and centrality of time as duration), the shift from fixed to mobile conceptions of movement in relation to time and that articulate how cinematic movement-images, when composed into a whole, simultaneously express a whole which goes beyond them. Let us consider each briefly in turn.

1) Movement Is Distinct from the Space Covered

Bergson's first thesis, according to Deleuze, holds that movement as such is *qualitative*, and so cannot be divided up without changing qualitatively (1986: 1). Space, on the other hand, is quantitative and so can be divided indefinitely. Space is homogeneous, movement heterogeneous (Deleuze 1986: 1). Contra Zenoian paradoxes of movement, this implies that movement cannot be recomposed out of individual positions in space or instants in time; static sections (positions and instants) can only be synthesised in succession to create an 'illusory' movement. This is what happens in cinema, according to Bergson, which synthesises static images, passing in rapid succession, in order to generate a 'false movement': the illusionistic impression of movement on screen. However, what we experience in film, Deleuze claims, is a 'mobile section of duration': a 'movement-image' that moves in itself, enabling genuine movements to be captured and extended over time through the cinematic devices of framing, editing, cutting, montage and so on (1986: 2–3).

2) Ancient versus Modern Conceptions of Movement

According to Deleuze/Bergson, there are two ways of composing 'illusory' forms of movement (that is, recomposing movement from static instants or 'poses').[3] For the Greeks, movement was composed via intelligible elements or eternal Forms; for the moderns, following modern science, movement refers to generic temporal instants or what Deleuze calls the 'any-instant-whatever' (1986: 3–4). Time is construed as an independent variable, which allows movement to be measured and quantified. Cinema inherits this quantitative conception of movement and of time, and so it can therefore be defined as 'the system which reproduces movement by relating it to the any-instant-whatever' (Deleuze 1989: 6).

3) Movement Expresses a Qualitative Change in the Whole

According to Bergsonian/Deleuzian process philosophy, what we take to be temporal instants are only 'immobile sections' of movement; movement itself, on the contrary, is a 'mobile section' expressing qualitative change in a larger Whole (Deleuze 1989: 8). From this holistic perspective, movement is an expression of qualitative change; it is an expression of what Bergson famously called *duration* [*durée*]. What we take to be static images are 'frozen' movements or 'immobile sections' of movement, fixed segments of *durée* (Deleuze 1989: 8–9). As we shall see, a key distinction comes into play here: that between mobile sections of duration, which Deleuze calls *movement-images*, and direct images of duration (*time-images*) in which time is no longer subordinated to movement.

What is the metaphysical background to this account? According to Bergson, the world perceived through everyday perception is a world conditioned by habit and the necessity of action: it is a selective field of perception, oriented towards action, that 'spatialises' movement as real change. The world of natural perception, for Bergson, is organised (but also distorted) according to our interests and needs: distinct bodies are carved out in perception, change is projected into spatial figures, and movements between bodies are represented as quantitative movements between points. Movement, as a real, dynamic, qualitative process, is transformed into quantitative distance, the numerical distance between points, which also relies on the idea of time as a series of abstract static moments – time as an empty form in

which abstract processes are supposed to occur. According to Bergson, real time, however, means *duration*: the generation of difference and newness via *real qualitative change* (where no instant is the same as the next) in which physical movements express qualitative changes in the Whole. Bergson's final metaphysical picture is therefore dualistic; the true world is a world in motion, in continuous flux, a world of qualities in constant interaction with others: 'Matter thus resolves itself into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and traveling in every direction like shivers' (Bergson 1994: 208).

What follows from these Bergsonian theses concerning movement and time? For Deleuze, Bergson's metaphysics provides a powerful way of understanding film's presentation of movement and time. Bergson's central claim – that we erroneously 'spatialise' movement and time – is directly applicable to the cinema. What position does film occupy, given the dualism between movement and time that Bergson sets up? Does it provide us with access to real qualitative change, that is, real movement unfolding in duration? Or does it merely present an abstract spatialisation or 'reification' of real movement? Interestingly, despite his evident interest in the cinema, Bergson argued that everyday perception is akin to what he called the 'cinematographic illusion': the representation of abstract or illusory movement based on the recomposition of static moments or poses. This is because cinema, in a technical or mechanical sense, seems to be doing exactly what the mathematical representation of movement does: it presents a series of fixed images freezing a reality that is actually in constant motion, projecting at regular speed in such a way as to generate the illusion of motion. In this sense cinema seems to work in the same way as everyday perception: fixed or static images, linked through empty moments in time, to generate a pragmatically directed perception of movement oriented towards action.

Does this mean we should accept Bergson's scepticism towards the cinema? Not necessarily – such scepticism, as Deleuze points out, actually runs counter to what Bergson claims in his earlier work *Matter and Memory* (published in 1896). Indeed, Deleuze challenges Bergson's critique of the way that cinema composes an 'illusory' movement out of a series of static images. Like contemporary cognitivists, Bergson underlines the selective and interest-driven character of perception; the way our brains select out cognitively salient objects or features of our environment that are relevant to our immediate practical ends or goal-directed actions (see Grodal 2009; Plantinga 2009a). As a vitalist process-philosopher, however, Bergson claims that the selective nature of perception shows how we thereby *distort* the

processual, dynamic character of reality. As for the cinema, Bergson (like Gaut and Carroll) takes an *illusionist* view of cinematic movement: since the impression of movement is generated by the animation of a series of static images or poses, cinematic images can only reveal an *illusory* movement that remains dependent on 'real' movement (like of the film strip through the projector).[4] Deleuze, however, in a manner echoing Currie, argues that this Bergsonian criticism confuses the mechanistic process that generates movement with the immediate movement perceived in the image.[5] Rather than reduce the immanent movement in the image to an illusory representation, Deleuze argues that the movement-image depicts movement *directly* without being reducible to the mechanical process that generated it.

Despite Bergson's own critique of cinema as producing a 'false' representation of movement, Deleuze argues that Bergson's conception of the movement-image – which presents a direct image of movement 'in itself' rather than an indirect representation of it – offers a way to develop an alternative ontology of moving images (Deleuze 1986: 1–11). The moving image is not simply a representation of movement but rather a 'movement-image': an image that expresses real movement, which is to say, as *qualitative change* occurring in duration. Applying Bergson's theses on movement to the cinema yields the following claims: 1) cinema produces movement-images depicting movement *within* the image; 2) film expresses movement *between* composed images (montage); and 3) this composed series of images expresses duration *across the whole* of the film and beyond it (i.e. a change in the Whole or world-context) (Deleuze 1986: 11). These three Bergsonian theses on movement provide Deleuze with a conceptual framework for analysing and classifying cinematic images (namely as varieties of movement-image and time-image).

Movement-Image

Deleuze's ontological project, in short, is to define the specificity of cinema as depicting movement in relation to generic instants (the 'any-instant-whatever'), which allow for the measuring of movement against a succession of equidistant temporal instants (t_1, t_2, t_3, . . .). As we saw, Deleuze follows Bergson in arguing that movement cannot be deduced from pre-existing 'transcendental poses', static positions or privileged moments (1986: 4). Rather, cinema is a mechanical system of *animating* images that enables the

reproduction of movement 'as a function of the any-instant-whatever' (equidistant temporal instants), which are selected and combined in order 'to create the impression of continuity' (Deleuze 1986: 5). Once the technical apparatus of creating movement-images via generic instants is adapted 'as a machine of synthesis for purposes of art and entertainment', we have, according to Deleuze, the cinema (1986: 6).

More specifically, once an image is related to a 'static' point of view – what Bergson calls a 'centre of indetermination' in the image nexus – we have a *perception-image*, which can take 'objective' and 'subjective' forms (the establishing shots that open many films, or the shot-countershot format depicting dialogue, respectively). Perception, however, is linked with action, both in the sensory-motor schema of human cognition and in the image nexus composing narrative film. Once an image is related to a perception-image and to an encompassing milieu, we have the *action-image*; the familiar medium shots, for example, of characters expressing their perception of a situation through action (like the Mexican standoff scene in Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) or the famous opening gunfight scene in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968)).

The link between perception and action, however, is a *complex* rather than reflex movement. The 'gap' or 'interval' between perception and action – whether in cognition or in narrative film – is filled by *affect* or *affection* (the ways in which our bodies are affected by movement). This yields the *affection-image*, which expresses bodily affect or emotion but also qualities and powers in an ontological sense (as pure singularities). Affection-images are most familiar as the close-up of the face or of affectively charged objects, which express affect but also qualities by sensuous means (the 'dancing bag' sequence in Mendes' *American Beauty* (1999), or the bright pool of blood that so fascinates Ricky Fitts [Wes Bentley] in the same film). Affection-images gain intensity, moreover, when the perception-action nexus is interrupted, thereby opening up an affective space for the expression of pure qualitative states or 'non-subjective' affects. For Deleuze, affects are not simply the expression of a subjective feeling or sensation on the part of a human subject; rather, they express 'pure qualities' manifested between subjects, in relation to objects or even via places and landscapes.

Again following Bergson, Deleuze takes this perception-affection-action circuit to articulate the basic mechanism of action-driven narrative film. The latter is governed by the 'sensory-motor action schema' (Deleuze 1986: 155 ff.): the linking of perception-, affection- and action-images within an

encompassing milieu. The action-image is typically associated with *realism*, which Deleuze defines via the relationship between a milieu and behaviour: a milieu that actualises various qualities and powers, and modes of behaviour expressing individuated responses to this milieu (1986: 141). Realist action-image cinema is defined by two major forms: the 'large form' (Deleuze 1986: 142 ff.), found in genres such as the documentary, the Western, psycho-social drama, film noir and the historical drama, in which an initial situation (S) leads to action (A) that modifies the situation (SAS_1). And the 'small form' (Deleuze 1986: 160 ff.), in which action (A) discloses a partially obscure situation (S), which leads to new action (ASA_1), found in genres such as melodrama and comedy.

Crisis of the Action-Image

Although it is clearly one of the most recognised theoretical claims in both *Cinema* volumes, Deleuze offers not one but *three* related versions of the 'crisis of the action-image' and its philosophical and ethico-political implications (call these the aesthetic, historical and ethical versions of the 'crisis').[6] The first or 'aesthetic' account can be found in the final chapter of *Cinema 1*, the conclusion to the overall analysis of the varieties of movement-image set out in the first volume (Deleuze 1986: 197 ff.). Deleuze sets out this crisis as an aesthetic, rather than cultural-political, problem. The chapter commences with a discussion of C. S. Peirce's concept of 'thirdness', which refers, in this context, to images depicting mental relations. Indeed, Deleuze suggests that the 'classical' narrative cinema – based on the sensory-motor action schema of perception, evoking affection and leading to action – culminates in a cinematic exploration of mental relations, notably in Hitchcock's films (1986: 200 ff.). Not only does Hitchcock introduce the 'mental image into the cinema' (Deleuze 1986: 203), taking mental relations as the object of cinematic presentation (inference, deduction, abduction and so on), he is one of the first to fully implicate the spectator in the film (Deleuze 1986: 205), while turning characters into 'viewers' or spectators (like 'Jeff' [James Stewart] in *Rear Window*). At the same time, however, Hitchcock's 'completion' of classical narrative or action-image cinema in 'mental-images' opens up the exploration of time and thought beyond the action-image by precipitating a fully-fledged 'crisis of the traditional image of cinema' (Deleuze 1986: 205).

Italian Neo-Realism and the French *nouvelle vague*

The second or 'historical' version of the crisis appears in relation to Deleuze's discussion of the emergence of post-war time-image cinema. Despite Deleuze's emphasis on the change in European cinema that occurred during and after WWII, the 'crisis of the action-image', as Deleuze remarks (1986: 205) has always accompanied the cinema, from the early days of pre-narrative cinema to the 'purest action films' of today. Indeed, for Deleuze, the two key aspects of this 'crisis' – the presentation of an *open totality*, which breaks open the sensory-motor action circuit, and *capturing the event* 'in the course of happening', which opens up a sense of duration – are integral to cinematic art and 'part of the profound Bergsonianism of the cinema in general' (Deleuze 1986: 206). From this point of view, time-images and non-standard ('crystalline') forms of narrative are a part of cinema, even though they have played a secondary role in relation to dominant forms of imagery and narrative composition.

Nonetheless, Deleuze claims that there is a specific sense of 'historical' crisis emerging in the wake of WWII with profound effects on European cinema and Hollywood. Here the emphasis shifts to the historical, cultural and social factors that have contributed to the crisis in inherited forms of cinematic narration. As Deleuze describes:

> We might mention, in no particular order, the war and its consequences, the unsteadiness of the 'American Dream' in all its aspects, the new consciousness of minorities, the rise and inflation of images both in the external world and in people's minds, the influence on the cinema of the new modes of narrative with which literature had experimented, the crisis of Hollywood and the old genres . . .
>
> Deleuze 1986: 206

The aftermath of WWII, the post-war shifts in social, cultural and political attitudes, as well as aesthetic shifts in classical cinema, all contribute to the crisis of the action-image. The latter phrase, for Deleuze, designates an 'undoing' of the 'system of actions, perceptions, and affections on which cinema had fed up to that point', a caesura in the history of film which opened up 'the soul of cinema' to new forms of thought (Deleuze 1986: 206). Deleuze summarises this polyvalent crisis as one in which the link between perception, affection and action becomes attenuated, a profound development which begins to loosen, in a broader cultural sense, our meaningful links

with the world. Taking both aesthetic and historical versions into account, the 'crisis of the action-image' can be described as both a cultural-historical and aesthetic-psychological condition. As Deleuze observes: 'We hardly believe any longer that a global situation can give rise to an action which is capable of modifying it – no more than we believe that an action can force a situation to disclose itself, even partially' (1986: 206).

As I discuss below, the third or 'ethical' sense of the crisis of the action image refers to this generalised *crisis of belief* in narration and representation – the attenuation of links between situation and action, in short, a weakening of 'the sensory-motor links which produced the action-image' (Deleuze 1986: 206) – that underlies the broader shift from movement-image to time-image cinema. It is also, however, a productive 'crisis' that signals the emergence of new cinematic signs, including the new kinds of image and narrative styles that would appear in post-war cinema. Deleuze identifies a number of distinctive cinematic traits characterising the crisis of the action-image that gives rise to the new cinema of time (1986: 207–210). First, there is the shift from globalising or synthetic to dispersive or elliptical situations with multiple characters, weak interferences, no single principal character or defining narrative arc (Deleuze 1986: 207). Second, there is a loosening of the causal thread linking actions and events within a given spatio-temporal milieu. Situations are presented as elliptical, reality itself as dispersive; relations or connections between people, actions and events are weak, random or contingent, protagonists are seemingly disconnected from the events that happen to them (Deleuze 1986: 207). Third, action-driven, sensory-motor narratives are replaced by meandering, episodic forms of narration (which Deleuze describes as the 'voyage' or 'stroll' [*ballad*] form). Journeys feature strongly, devoid of definite destinations, and occur in an indeterminate, nondescript, generic space: the 'any-space-whatever', such as 'the marshalling yard, disused warehouse, the undifferentiated fabric of the city' (Deleuze 1986: 208). Fourth, this dispersed and contingent world, lacking 'totality or linkage', is held together by 'floating images, . . . anonymous clichés' (Deleuze 1986: 208). Cinematic clichés, for Deleuze, are 'sensory-motor images' of a thing, or habituated audio-visual schemata that add a semblance of instrumental meaning to objects in the world. This romanticist, sceptical critique of the banality of modern life is a constant temptation, one for which Deleuze criticises various auteurs (mostly American), who contribute to the nihilism they would seek to critique (1986: 209). Finally, an alternative way of securing meaning appears via the theme of conspiracy, a hidden order of causality behind appearances that gives the world its fragile

or ambiguous meaning (Deleuze 1986: 210). This is another trope in the romantic pessimism that Deleuze criticises in American independent cinema, which receives short shrift compared with his more considered discussions of post-war European cinema (Italian neo-realism, the French *nouvelle vague*, and New German cinema).

This is not merely an aesthetic judgment, but a critical diagnosis of the 'crisis of the American dream'. Deleuze's five characteristics of the 'new image' – '*the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, the condemnation of the plot*' (1986: 210; italics in original) – reflect both a crisis in the action-image and a crisis in post-war American culture. It is not entirely clear, however, whether this dual sense of cinematic and cultural-historical crisis means that cinema is reflecting certain underlying historical-ideological processes or that cinema is an independent expression of these processes but remains irreducible to them. Does the crisis of the action-image represent a deeper historical-cultural, even philosophical shift, or a novel aesthetic development in cinema that remains independent of these historical and cultural processes? Whatever the answer, the relationship between cinema and politics, as elsewhere in *Cinema 2*, remains an intimate and involved one. The sceptical questioning of the sensory-motor action schema in cinema, but also in American culture and politics, reveals the possibility of an alternative order of images. Such an order, however, would require a meaningful narrative framework and accompanying form of practice – 'an aesthetic and political project capable of constituting a positive enterprise' (Deleuze 1986: 201) – in order to be fully realised or culturally expressed. Lacking such a positive project, the result is sceptical irony, romantic pessimism or 'postmodern cynicism', which marks, for Deleuze, the limits of both American cinema and of the 'American dream' more broadly (1986: 210).

In a narrative familiar from discussions of postmodernism in the 1980s, Deleuze points to the exhaustion of the devices of classical narrative cinema and the problem of cinematic cliché. Indeed, in keeping with critiques that one can find in Jameson (1991) and others (Foster 1983), Deleuze criticises American auteurs such as Altman and Scorsese for their nihilistic repetition of clichés, loss of conviction in artistic possibilities and their romanticist indulgence in an ironic pessimism that remains unable to constitute new forms of (cinematic and cultural-political) creativity. One can certainly dispute Deleuze's sweeping dismissal of new American cinema as well as American cultural-political creativity, relying as it does on a slender selection of cinematic examples and a vague parallel with the waning of American/

Western 'grand narratives' since the 1970s. Nonetheless, the key point is that Deleuze's diagnosis of the 'crisis of the action-image' is as much about a condition of cultural nihilism as it is about the history of cinematic art.

Beyond the Movement-Image (Italian Neo-Realism)

The 'great crisis of the action-image', Deleuze claims, took place in Italy immediately after WWII (1986: 211), namely with the appearance of Rossellini's important post-war trilogy, *Rome Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (1946) and *Germany Year Zero* (1948), followed by his 1950s trilogy, *Stromboli* (1950), *Europa '51* (1952) and *Journey to Italy* (1954). Deleuze alludes to further social and historical factors explaining why Italy became the flashpoint for the development of neo-realism (the experience of defeat, the occupation by Germany, widespread urban destruction, poverty, corruption, a cinema industry and institutions that had managed to survive fascism and 'a resistance and popular life underlying oppression, although one without illusion' (1986: 211)). This distinctive cultural-historical situation required new images and stories that could communicate 'the elliptical and unorganised' experience of the post-war world (Deleuze 1986: 211). A new cinema was needed, one not only capable of capturing this ambiguous and uncertain reality but of 'questioning afresh all the accepted facts of the American tradition' (Deleuze 1986: 212).

The result was Italian neo-realism, which articulated the aforementioned five characteristics of the shift beyond the movement-image. Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* and *Paisan*, for example, 'discovered a dispersive and lacunary reality. . . a series of fragmentary, chopped up encounters' (Deleuze 1986: 212), which could no longer be accommodated within the sensory-motor schemata of the action image (what Deleuze calls the SAS or Situation_1–Action–Situation_2 form of action movie genres such as the Western or the War movie). De Sica's films, on the other hand, shattered the 'ASA form' (the Action_1–Situation–Action_2 schema found in genres such as melodrama or comedy, where a small action discloses a partially hidden or concealed situation, leading to further actions). They showed how events lose their co-ordinated causal links with each other within an attenuated, loosely-unified world-context, how events are governed now more by contingency and chance than social or historical necessity: 'there is no longer a vector or line of

the universe which extends and links up the events of *The Bicycle Thief* (Deleuze 1986: 212). Insignificant events, which no longer cohere within a meaningful whole, take on significance for themselves, as in de Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952), with its microdramas of the pregnant maid Maria [Maria Pia Casilio] or the melancholy, everyday struggles of Umberto D. [Carlo Battisti] to maintain his room, his dog and his dignity. Such a world, Deleuze remarks, curiously enough, is already held together by clichés, the universal ascendancy of the 'reign of clichés, internally and externally, in people's heads and hearts as much as in the whole of space' (Deleuze 1986: 212). Curious, since neo-realism is supposed to have found new images in response to the problem of clichés, rather than deploying these for new artistic and ethical ends.

The second version of the 'crisis of the action-image', centring on the historical factors shaping post-war European cinema, appears in the opening chapter of *Cinema 2*, where Deleuze resumes the 'beyond the movement-image' story with a brief but explicit discussion of Italian neo-realism (1989: 1–24). Taking his lead from Bazin's formal aesthetic definition, Deleuze again emphasises the 'new form of reality' in these films, which is 'dispersive, elliptical, errant or wavering, working in blocs, with deliberately weak connections and floating events' (1989: 1). This social and historical reality, however, is not presented transparently; rather, it is an 'always ambiguous, to be deciphered real' that is 'aimed at', rather than recorded, and thus requires a 'new type of image' (like Bazin's 'fact-image') (Deleuze 1989: 1). Where Deleuze parts company with Bazin is over the question of 'reality', questioning Bazin's claim that neo-realism's attempts to capture the new reality of post-war Europe, whether in social-historical, 'formal or material' terms (Deleuze 1989: 1). On the contrary, Deleuze asks whether it is a question of *thought* rather than 'reality' at issue in the new cinema:

> If all the movement-images, perceptions, actions and affects underwent such an upheaval, was this not first of all because a new element burst on to the scene which was to prevent perception being extended into action in order to put it in contact with thought, and, gradually, was to subordinate the image to the demands of new signs which would take it beyond movement?
>
> Deleuze 1989: 1

Neo-realism displays a 'philosophical' trajectory, reflecting that of modern (European) cinema: the discovery and composition of new cinematic signs (pure optical and sound situations), new images and forms of narration (time-images and crystalline narration), culminating in the emergence of a new kind of cinema 'beyond the movement-image'.

Indeed, Deleuze's philosophical reinterpretation of neo-realism clearly accords with his thesis concerning the modern (post-Kantian) philosophical reversal of the subordination of time to movement (see Deleuze 1984), coupled with his Bergsonian re-inscription of 'the essence' of cinema as re-conceptualising the relationship between thought and time, achieving its aim of expressing thought in images.[7] Not only does the social content of neo-realism disappear, so too does Bazin's affirmation of cinema's vocation to reveal a transfigured sense of reality. Instead, Deleuze gives neo-realism a philosophical cast as that revolutionary moment in modern cinema when film begins to 'think' cinematically in grappling with the expression of duration and of thought. Also curious in Deleuze's account of neo-realism is the minor role played by social-political factors or historical-ideological context. It is an account that foregrounds, rather, the aesthetic problem of images in response to the attenuated post-war sense of a meaningfully organised or coherent social reality. Indeed, the principal problem facing post-war cinema, according to Deleuze, is the breakdown of the old (sensory-motor) paradigms of narrative composition and the corrosive effects of the reign of cultural-cinematic clichés. It is only out of this disrupted sense of world with its discredited forms of representation that a new image might arise from the ashes of cliché. Italian neo-realism sensed the problem ('in-itself'), but such a problem becomes self-reflexive ('for-itself') only later within the French *nouvelle vague*, with its ironic treatment of the sensory-motor action schema in response to the crisis of cliché (Deleuze 1989: 8–9 ff.).

The American response to this crisis, as remarked, is criticised for lapsing into romantic pessimism and empty parody. In either case, the problem remains that of 'finding an image' amidst the morass of clichés without lapsing into sterile repetition (Deleuze 1986: 214). The way out, Deleuze argues, is to turn to thought and time (1986: 215): the mental image (reaching its Hollywood highpoint with Hitchcock) has to become time-image (reaching its apogee in European cinema with Resnais). As we shall see, Deleuze's teleological history of post-war cinema moves from the crisis of the sensory-motor action schema, to the discovery of pure optical and sound situations and the emergence of 'crystalline' (parametric, to use Bordwell's term) narration, which heralds a new cinema capable of restoring our 'belief in this world'.

This theme is announced in *Cinema 2* by the shift from the problem of cliché (with which *Cinema 1* concluded) to the 'pure optical and sound situations' defining the new sense of reality in post-war European cinema. Deleuze cites a number of canonical scenes from classic neo-realist films: the pregnant maid Maria making coffee and quietly considering her bleak

future in *Umberto D.*; the suicide of the boy Edmund [Edmund Moeschke] in *Germany Year Zero*, who 'dies from what he sees' (Deleuze 1989: 2). Karin's [Ingrid Bergman's] devastating revelation of the horrors of everyday reality in *Stromboli*; the conversion of grieving Irene [Ingrid Bergman] in *Europa '51*, who is transfigured by her visions of the poor and experience working in a factory. Or the shattering experience of the female tourist Katherine [Bergman again] in *Journey to Italy* [*Viaggio in Italia*] (1954), whose experience of images and visual clichés is one in which 'she discovers something unbearable, beyond the limit of what she can personally bear' (Deleuze 1989: 2). Neo-realism, with its pure optical and sound situations that no longer extend into action, becomes 'a cinema of the seer and no longer that of the agent [*de voyant, non plus d'actant*]' (Deleuze 1989: 2). It inaugurates a new kind of cinema – centred on the experience of time, the trauma of memory, the disorientation of space and the collapse of agency – by introducing a new regime of images and signs.

Such is Deleuze's second version of the 'beyond the movement-image' thesis, which emphasises the emergence of pure optical and sound situations with Ozu, neo-realism and the French New Wave. It is no longer the problem of the cliché that matters but that of responding – culturally and artistically – to a dispersed, disorganised world where sensory-motor action schemas have become ineffectual or inoperative. Unlike the first version, it is what defines Italian neo-realism (the proliferation of purely optical and sound situations), as distinct from the sensory-motor situations of the action-image within older forms of realism (Deleuze 1989: 2). Spectator identification with characters gives way to the presentation of characters as spectators; the sensory-motor situations falter and give way to pure optical and sound situations that outstrip the motor capacities of characters, who now appear as visionary seers rather than motivated agents. The main characteristics of the crisis of the action-image – the 'voyage' or trip/ballad narrative form, the multiplication of clichés, characters indifferent to the events that befall them, the relaxing of sensory-motor relations – are now presented as the preliminary conditions for the post-war appearance of pure optical and sound situations that herald the new time-image cinema.

The Time-Image

How can cinema present time directly? Can the moving image express dimensions of time other than the present? Deleuze's 'sequel' volume, *Cinema*

2: The Time-Image, examines this question in depth and proposes an account of the time-image and its varieties. Drawing again on Bergson, Deleuze points to the role of 'aberrant' (decentred) movements in disrupting the sensory-motor schema and reversing the subordination of time to movement:

> What aberrant movement reveals is time as everything, as 'infinite opening', as anteriority over all normal movement defined by *motivity* [*motoricité*]: time has to be anterior to the controlled flow of every action. . . If normal movement subordinates the time of which it gives us an indirect representation, aberrant movement speaks up for an anteriority of time that it presents to us directly, on the basis of the disproportion of scales, the dissipation of centres and the false continuity of the images themselves.
>
> Deleuze 1989: 37

It is worth noting the allusion to Bergson's conception of time and movement in the phrase 'infinite opening', that is, to the idea of time as presupposed by 'normal' or centred forms of movement understood as intentional and rational (defined by 'motivity'). We should also note Deleuze's emphasis here on the role of 'aberrant movements': decentred or irrational movements that do not appear to obey the laws of a given system.[8] In astronomy, for example, if we assume a geocentric model, the orbits of the planets will appear 'aberrant' in that they contradict predictions based on such a model (a model reversed, so to speak, by Copernicus and Kant). 'Normal' movements, in contrast, are defined by 'the existence of centres', which define a frame of reference in relation to which the movement of bodies becomes intelligible. Centred movements take many forms: 'centres of the revolution of movement itself, of equilibrium of forces, of gravity of moving bodies, and of observation for a viewer able to recognise or perceive the moving body, and to assign movement' (Deleuze 1989: 36). Normal movements correspond to the ordinary world of 'perception-action' (in Bergson's sense) in which we distinguish individuated bodies and regard movements between them as causally ordered with respect to a given frame of reference. Aberrant movement occurs when these centres are absent or lacking; decentred movements can no longer be attributed to causally ordered bodies within a given frame of reference. Such 'irrational' movements, according to Deleuze/Bergson, have the effect of disrupting the orderly subordination of time to movement, destroying the quantitative sense of time (taken as the 'number' of movement). For how, one might ask, could there be a rational order or measure for a movement that is inherently unpredictable or 'aberrant'?

Far from destroying time, however, Deleuze argues that aberrant movements destroy only the (abstract) quantitative account of time as the 'number of movement'; such movements liberate time from its subordination to movement, opening up the possibility of a direct 'time-image'. Following Bergson, Deleuze posits a shift from abstract time as dependent on movement (movements conforming to the laws of human action), to open up a real or concrete sense of time as pure duration (time as qualitative change). Deleuze brings this Bergsonian thesis concerning time to the cinema, an art of movement and time that has always been replete with aberrant movements that disrupt centred movements with fixed frames of reference (strange perspectives, unusual angles, discontinuities between shots, 'impossible' spectator positions and so on). Aberrant movements are the key to defining a new type of moving image capable of presenting time directly, as expressing time as duration (qualitative change): the time-image.

In Bergsonian terms, this shift towards time-image cinema is signalled by the disconnection of movement and action. With the shift away from action and its constraints, the 'sensory-motor schema' defining the circuits of perception-affection-action begin to break down. Movement in the abstract quantitative sense becomes pure movement decoupled from action, that is, movement as expressing qualitative change or time as duration. We can understand this shift, moreover, from the movement-image to the time-image in two ways: aesthetically and historically. From an aesthetic point of view, we see the emergence of a new regime of signs, moving images no longer defined via the sensory-motor action schema but rather by 'pure optical and sound situations'. These refer to pure audiovisual descriptions that are no longer centred or explained by an assumed frame of reference organised by 'normal' processes of perception and action. From an historical point of view, according to Deleuze, although cinema was always capable of aberrant movement – early cinema is rife with striking examples, and so in principle could have developed direct time-images – this possibility becomes explicitly thematic only with 'modern cinema'.[9]

Curiously, Deleuze refers here principally to post-war European directors' or auteur cinema, identifying this important shift in modern cinema history as marking the definitive 'break' inaugurating a new kind of image and narrative regime. Commencing with Italian neo-realism, followed by the French *nouvelle vague*, a new kind of cinematic image appears (the time-image) with a corresponding transformation in narrative style and structure. This shift continues with post-war German cinema (during the 1970s), American independent cinema (in the 1970s and into the early 1980s) and

concludes, by Deleuze's reckoning, in the mid- to late-1980s (tracking Deleuze's comments on recent film in *Cinema 2*, published in 1985). The 'crystalline' regime of time-image cinema is defined by a number of features: a shift to loosely organised, meandering narrative, with an episodic structure; psychologically opaque characters who observe their environment rather than reacting to it; the prevalence of indeterminate milieus ('any-space-whatever') rather than clearly identified, determinate locations; random, contingent links between events, rather than causally ordered processes; a reflexive consciousness of clichés; and characters expressing malaise as a response to something 'intolerable' in reality. These are films, in short, that express a *loss of conviction* in the world: a failure of received narrative frameworks or systems of belief to organise action by psychologically motivated characters. This shift is grounded in a number of processes: the uncoupling of the links between perception-affection-action and a reversal of the primacy of movement (the 'sensory-motor scheme') such that perception is no longer extended into action, affection gives rise to thought and movement is no longer subordinated to time.

Deleuze summarises his theses on time-image cinema as follows:

> What has happened is that the sensory-motor schema is no longer in operation. It is shattered from the inside. That is, perceptions and actions ceased to be linked together, and spaces are now neither coordinated, nor filled. Some characters, caught in certain pure optical and sound situations, find themselves condemned to wander about or go off on a trip. These are pure seers, who no longer exist except in the interval of movement. They are given over to something intolerable, which is simply their everydayness itself.
>
> Deleuze 1989: 90

We can see this 'crisis' in the sensory-motor schema and uncoupling of the links between perception, affection and action in many examples of post-war cinema. Such films are defined by the prevalence of pure optical and sound situations and a loose, unstructured narrative form, where time is no longer subordinated to movement (think, for example, of *The Rules of the Game*, *Citizen Kane*, *Bicycle Thieves*, *Tokyo Story*, *Breathless*, *Easy Rider*, *Alice in the Cities*, *Badlands*, *My Own Private Idaho* and so on). Although time-image cinema never became the dominant mode of cinematic art, it constitutes a tradition that continues today in independent art cinema and contemporary 'slow cinema'. It is not confined to any particular cultural or historical tradition of cinema, and is arguably more prevalent in contemporary strains of 'world cinemas' where slow or contemplative cinema has flourished (see de Luca and Jorge 2015). This still accords, in many ways, with Deleuze's central thesis,

notwithstanding his 'Eurocentric' biases; namely that time-image cinema tends to emerge under conditions of historico-political crisis and/or social-cultural transformation, where prevailing narrative and ideological structures start to disintegrate (see Martin-Jones 2006, 2011).

Unlike Cavell, as we shall see, Deleuze stresses the 'intolerability' of the everyday, as articulated in post-war European cinema. Why is everydayness 'intolerable'? At one level, it is because of the traumatic experiences and upheavals of WWII, which have left traditional moral frameworks, political worldviews and ideological narratives shattered. At another, it is because the modern world reveals itself as 'in-human': as no longer responding to conventional humanist moral frameworks but also presenting itself as alien, dehumanising, bereft of meaning, a world that no longer provides a familiar or tractable sense of world. In a more metaphysical register, the world itself comes to be viewed as pure change, as indifferent to our ordinary human interests, as having temporal dimensions that escape us. The crisis of the sensory-motor image reveals, on the one hand, that we have lost a sensory-motor connection with the world, but on the other, that we have also found new ways of experiencing it. The attenuation of the link between perception and action opens up different forms of affect, of reflection, indeed a different experience of time. In short, the advent of time-cinema cinema, for Deleuze, opens up *a new experience of thought*.

Thought and Cinema

Deleuze's most explicit treatment of the cinema-thought relationship is in Chapter 7 of *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, although elements of this account recur throughout his work (1989: 156–188). Deleuze refers here to French actor, author and filmmaker Antonin Artaud as well as to the theoretical work of Sergei Eisenstein, both of whom stressed the capacity of moving images to enact a sensuous and affective 'shock' capable of provoking thought. Drawing Jean-Louis' Schefer's *The Ordinary Man of the Cinema* (2016), he develops the concept of the 'spiritual automaton' (the subject of logical thought, according to Spinoza and Leibniz), which is applied to our 'involuntary' cinematic experience of being subject to the concatenation of images as they appear in film (see Vaughan 2012; ffrench 2017). The 'logical' subject of rationally connected thoughts is transposed into the 'inhuman' cinematic subject of temporally connected moving images (movement-images composing a film), images that offer an indirect expression of 'the

Whole'. Deleuze emphasises here the power of cinema, with its imposition of an ordered sequences of images, to create a circuit between moving images and the brain/subjectivity of the viewer, a circuit with the power to induce a perceptual-affective 'shock' that provokes thinking.

Jean Epstein and Eisenstein also believed in the power of cinema to provoke a shock inducing thought (its power to induce a transformation of experience or a revolutionary consciousness), but this 'modernist' idea of an expanded cinema soon gave way to disappointment. Far from bringing about revolutionary change, the transformational power of cinema was used, more often than not, to support fascism, distraction and ideological manipulation, the unholy alliance between the forces of fascism and those of mass entertainment, or the bringing together of 'Hitler and Hollywood, Hollywood and Hitler': 'The spiritual automaton became fascist man' (Deleuze 1989: 164) . What did remain viable, however, was the idea of the cinematic sublime as an expression of a shock that forces thought: the collapse of the imagination as it is pushed to its limit 'and forces thought to think the whole as intellectual totality which goes beyond the imagination' (Deleuze 1989: 157).

Deleuze's example here is Eisenstein's account of intellectual montage: there is the perceptual shock from moving image to conscious thought (percept to concept), then from concept to affect, which returns, via an affective shock, from thought to the image (1989: 158). This experience of cinematic 'sublimity' links intellectual cinema to emotional intelligence: it expresses a non-verbal 'internal monologue' or 'primitive language' articulated through the concatenation of images, where the whole film is now understood as a 'spiritual automaton' – or non-human quasi-subject – expressing thought and affect through image montage (Deleuze 1989: 159). The third moment of this dialectic between image and concept is the 'identity' of concept and image: a dialectical combination of image and thought or an action-thought that expresses our relationship to the world and nature more generally (Deleuze 1989: 161). For Deleuze, Eisenstein's dialectical model of the relationship between thought and cinema is paradigmatic for the movement-image regime of narrative cinema (defined by the sensory-motor action schema linking perception, affection, with action). It offers an active conscious expression of the three relationships between film and thought that are most common in movement-image cinema: '*the relationship with a whole which can only be thought in a higher awareness, the relationship with a thought which can only be shaped in the unconscious unfolding of images, the sensory-motor relationship between*

world and man, nature and thought' (Deleuze 1989: 163; italics in original). From this point of view, cinema is capable of communicating an action-oriented mode of thought aiming at a revolutionary transformation of consciousness and of the world itself.

Such utopian revolutionary hopes, however, were soon dashed, as the harsh realities of 20th century history and totalitarian politics shattered the faith of early filmmakers and utopian theorists in the transformative power of cinema. Deleuze thus turns to Artaud in order to explore the post-war transition from the movement-image regime to that of time-image cinema (images that subordinate movement to time, that disrupt the action-oriented sensory-motor schemata and rational, causally organised montage in order to express time directly). Like Eisenstein, Artaud explores the movement from image to thought via a 'shock' or vibration acting directly on our nervous system, and then the movement from thought to image again via visual 'figures' articulating an 'internal monologue', expressed through images, which gives rise in turn to an affective shock. Unlike Eisenstein, however, Artaud recognises the impotence or 'powerlessness of thought' that cinema is also apt to express: the inherent passivity of the cinematic experience, the inability of thought alone to directly motivate action or to actively transform consciousness in the manner that Eisenstein envisaged.

This shift, which anticipates the shift from movement-image to time-image cinema, is linked to the breakdown in the idea of an organic unity or totality expressing the Whole (the breakdown in the sensory-motor regime of action-thought). Artaud emphasises cinema's potential to enact an experiential revelation of the disruptive failure or 'impower' of thought that nonetheless calls forth thought – through the perceptual-affective shock of images acting directly on our nervous system – and that fosters the indirect presentation of the Whole as a disruptive experience of cognitive breakdown (via what Artaud calls the 'crack' or 'fissure'). What cinema reveals is not that we are capable of thinking the Whole but, on the contrary, 'the fact that we are not yet thinking (Heidegger)' (Deleuze 1989: 167) – an allusion to Heidegger's famous dictum that what is most thought-provoking in modernity is that we are not yet thinking (about the meaning of Being). Like Maurice Blanchot in regard to modern literature, moreover, Artaud points to modern cinema's revelation of the impower [*impouvoir*] of thought, its failure to comprehend a disarticulated and disintegrated form of existence definitive of a fragmented and dispersed modernity: 'the figure of nothingness, the inexistence of a whole which could be thought' (Deleuze 1989: 168). Indeed, cinema's essence, Deleuze concludes, 'has thought as its

higher purpose, nothing but thought and its functioning' (1989: 168), even where this cinematic thought remains incapable of encompassing any organic unity, whether of human beings and nature or of the individual and society.

Artaud offers a challenging account of the disruptive experience of thought in modern cinema, an experience of the impotence or failure of thought to effectuate action, an experience of a crisis in agency following the breakdown of the sensory-motor/action-image regime. The sensory-motor break, which disrupts the link between perception, affect/reflection and action, is a response, Deleuze contends, to the traumatic experiences defining modernity (especially the impact of WWII but also, presumably, the failure of revolutionary communism). At the level of culture, it is expressed in a new kind of cinema that 'makes man a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in thought' (Deleuze 1989: 169). The intolerability of the world results in a failure to think in respect of a meaningful world or indeed for us to think at all (beyond cliché and stereotype). It precipitates a crisis in experience that transforms us from actors to *seers*; it shifts the task of cinema from satisfying our need to know the world to acknowledging the need for an existential 'belief in the world'.

Deleuze's Existential Imperative: Belief in This World

Deleuze adopts what we might call a more 'existentialist' ethical register in the third aspect of his account of time-image cinema: the problem of *belief in the world*, which results from the breakdown of prevailing representational or even ideological frameworks (the sensory-motor schema applied to narratives of historical meaning and political emancipation). In other words, it is the ethical problem of cinema and *nihilism* that now becomes the focus of cultural-philosophical attention: the need to renew our 'reasons to believe in this world' in the face of a loss of belief in the world, lack of conviction, brutality and violence, the dissipation of revolutionary hopes and aspirations for radical transformation.[10] Deleuze's modernist wager is that cinema can diagnose, respond to and perhaps overcome nihilism: it provides an ethical experience of meaning – via images exploring time and thought – in response to the crises of meaning afflicting the post-war world. We might

call this a cinematic ethics of immanent conversion: an existential affirmation of the world through its aesthetic re-enchantment, an experience revealed through, and given expression by, the cinema.

For Deleuze, the task of thinking in modern cinema (for which we might read 'modernist cinema') is to affirm our existential belief in 'a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as the impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but be thought' (Deleuze 1989: 170). Amidst the nihilistic aftermath of war, the loss of conviction in prevailing moral narratives and political frameworks, we need an existential affirmation of our bodily/corporeal connection with the world, an aesthetic experience of shock or cognitive disorientation through which we might learn 'to discover the unity of thought and life' (Deleuze 1989: 170). Much like Cavell, cinema can still show us the link between humanity and world, according to Deleuze, even though we may be suffering from a nihilism today in which 'we no longer believe in this world', a broken world that appears to us as though it were a 'bad film' (1989: 171). Deleuze describes here a cinematic version of the Nietzschean problematic of nihilism: the loss of belief in inherited, prevailing sources of normative value and social-cultural meaning in modernity. The central ethical question, for Deleuze, is whether cinema can give us 'reasons to believe' in a world mediated by manipulative or stereotypical images, especially where cinema's power to elicit conviction has waned. The task of art is to reanimate the existential-vitalist belief in the link between human beings and the world, in the immanence of thought and life, the creation of a thinking-in-images that finds its highest expression in modern cinema. Philosophy can thereby join forces with film as cultural practices with the power to reveal possibilities of existence and provide reasons to maintain fidelity with this shattered world.

Deleuzian cinematic ethics thus concerns the relationship between *cinema and belief*: how does the moving image elicit conviction for us? What can cinema do when inherited paradigms of representation (what Deleuze calls sensory-motor action schemas) or prevailing ideological narratives break down or lose their credibility? Can cinema restore a sense of belief in the world as an assemblage of images in which we no longer quite believe? Deleuze poses these questions most explicitly in the following oft-quoted passage:

> The link between man and the world has been broken. Henceforth, this link must become an object of belief: it is the impossible which can only be restored within a faith. Belief is no longer addressed to a different or transformed world. Man is in the world as if in a pure optical or sound

> situation. The reaction of which man has been dispossessed can be replaced only by belief. Only belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears. The cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world, our only link. . . Restoring our belief in the world – this is the power of modern cinema (when it stops being bad). Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, *we need reasons to believe in this world*.
>
> Deleuze 1989: 171–172

Deleuze describes nihilism here as a 'cinematographic' experience of the world: it involves a loss of belief, a disconnection between perception, affection and action, a reduction of the world to one in which images saturate our experience, yet evacuate the world of meaning, leaving its horizons indefinite and opaque. Transcendent sources of belief or mythic beliefs in progress (religion and ideology) no longer justify the world; rather, the world itself has become 'a bad film' in which we no longer really believe (or know how to act). The 'pure optical and acoustical situations' that defined post-war cinema have mutated, in our present context, into an all-pervasive, cognitively distracting audiovisual culture defined by a fragmented state of atomised immersion and incessant proliferation of enervating image clichés, 'fake' news and commodified informational resources.

What can film do in the face of such crises in meaning? This is the central ethical question of modern cinema: can it give us 'reasons to believe' in a world mediated by images, where cinema's power to elicit conviction has waned? Can we construct an ethics and politics of the image that could respond to the 'destruction of experience' (Benjamin) – shared, historically meaningful experience – within a fully mediatised modernity? Such questions provide a motivation for Deleuze's existential wager, which bets on cinema as a creative response to the moral-cultural nihilism undermining the contemporary conditions of social-political agency – a condition that cinema can exacerbate or to which it can respond creatively by eliciting thought. As a response to nihilism, we require a reanimation of existential-vitalist belief in the link between human beings and the world, in the immanence of thought and life. As Deleuze remarks:

> Which, then, is the subtle way out? To believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which nonetheless cannot but be thought. . . It is this belief that makes the unthought the specific power of thought, through the absurd, by virtue of the absurd.
>
> Deleuze 1989: 170

Deleuze advocates here an existential affirmation of the immanent link to the world, a link articulated in thought and expressed through cinema – in cinematic thinking – one that might enable us to retrieve the ethical relationship between thought and life. Philosophy can join with cinema as cultural media with the power to invent forms of life and provide reasons to maintain fidelity with the world. More specifically, this means rethinking what it means to be human, beyond the body/mind dualism that, through its opposition between a corrupted material-sensuous realm and an unattainable ideal-metaphysical realm, inevitably leads to scepticism. Our salvation in response to such scepticism, Deleuze claims, in a rather neo-romantic manner, lies in 'simply believing in the body' as the ground of our existence, 'before discourse, before words' (Deleuze 1989: 172–173), creating art that enables us to reconnect with the world in a sensuously embodied, creative and inventive manner. As we shall see, both Cavell and Deleuze thus emphasise the potential of cinema to serve as a means of evoking ethical experience, as an aesthetic response to cultural scepticism or moral nihilism, whether via creative self-transformation or an existential affirmation of our embodied being-in-the-world.

'Two Ages' of Cinema?

As a number of critics have noted, there seems to be a tension between Deleuze's conceptual taxonomy of image types, and his recourse to an historical account of the shift to time-image narrative.[11] Jacques Rancière (2006: 107–123), for example, argues that Deleuze's attempt to contrast 'two ages' of the cinema – a classical movement-image cinema, and a 'modern' time-image cinema – is untenable, for it posits a 'fictive' distinction between movement-images and time-images, and relies on questionable 'allegorical' interpretations of selected film examples to support these historical-ontological claims. For Rancière, there are two key questions for Deleuze's analysis: 1) How to explain the relationship between 'a break in the art of images and the ruptures that affect history in general?' (2006: 108); and 2) how to recognise, in actual films, the evidence of this break or shift between these two image-regimes, as well as the distinction between the movement-image and the time-image in specific cases? Rancière's critical response is twofold: to question Deleuze's reliance on an historical account to explain a shift of a conceptual order; and to argue that the distinction between movement-images and time-images collapses once we submit it to critical scrutiny.

To take the latter point first, the distinction between movement-image and time-image begins to blur within the course of Deleuze's analysis. The affection-image, for example, already expresses pure qualities that articulate a virtual power of the image independent of sensory-motor narrative (Dreyer's silent masterpiece, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), is hardly 'sensory-motor' action cinema, being one of the finest examples of affection-image/time-image film). Moreover, this blurring of the distinction between movement- and time-images appears in the very examples that Deleuze adduces in order to show the differences between them. Bresson, for example, is praised for his use of the affection-image to construct any-spaces-whatever (Deleuze 1986: 108–111), an account of Bresson that is more or less repeated in *Cinema 2* in relation to the theme of 'thought and cinema' (Rancière 2006: 112). The same film examples (say Dreyer or Bresson) can be used either to illustrate the role of affection-images, or to exemplify the breaking of the sensory-motor link that defines time-image cinema (Rancière 2006: 112). This equivocation renders doubtful Deleuze's firm distinction between movement-images and time-images, and his corresponding claims for the historical break with sensory-motor action narrative and transition to post-war time-image cinema.

Moreover, Deleuze supports his claims concerning the shift from sensory-motor action to time-image cinema by adducing film examples that function *allegorically*: films whose *narrative content* provides the 'evidence' demonstrating the crisis of the action image. Rancière cites a number of pertinent examples here: Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), with its immobilised photographer-protagonist 'Jeff' Jeffries [James Stewart], and *Vertigo* (1959), with its famous shot of Scotty [Stewart] hanging over the abyss by his fingertips; Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), with its linking of hands caring for, working with, or exploiting and abusing the eponymous donkey. Or there is *Pickpocket* (1959), whose thieves caress, rather than seize, their booty; and Tod Browning's silent film *The Unknown* (1927), with its circus performer who fakes having his arms amputated until being forced to do so in reality (2006: 114–119). The immobilised observer, obsessive detective, caressing thief and self-amputating performer all serve as allegorical figures – dependent on narrative content as much as the aesthetic features of the image – for the general 'crisis in the action-image'.

Rancière thus questions the validity of Deleuze's allegorical examples, whose narrative content is supposed to illustrate a generalised 'paralysis of action', as evidence justifying the claims made concerning the transition to a distinctively 'modern' time-image cinema (2006: 116–117). For Rancière,

this ambiguity between image-type and narrative content suggests that the distinction between movement-images and time-images is artificial; a 'fictive rupture' (2006: 119) that cannot be sustained in the face of cinema's complex dialectic between intentional and automatic elements, narrative and spectacle, representational form and aesthetic experimentation. Indeed, what Deleuze presents is less a shift from one discrete image regime to another than a 'dual perspective' model in which the same images/films can be analysed either from the perspective of movement-image or from that of time-image cinema (Rancière 2006: 114).

Echoing other critics of 'medium essentialism', Rancière too argues that cinema has no medium-specific 'essence' that could be read off a metaphysically grounded ontology of images or teleological historical narrative culminating in the 'modern' cinema of time (2006). The (Deleuzian) story of film, Rancière concludes, is thus a thwarted one, much like the 'film fables' defining cinema, forever divided between the competing vectors of narrative content and visual spectacle that undo each other continuously (2006: 1–18). Deleuze's 'fictive' opposition between the 'two ages of cinema' (classical and modern) does not do justice to the hybrid character of film; it rests, moreover, according to Rancière, upon an 'essentialising' 'ontology of the cinema argued for with bits and pieces gleaned from the entire *corpus* of the cinematographic art' (2006: 5).[12]

Paola Marrati (2008) has responded to Rancière's critique of Deleuze by dismissing the claim that there is a genuine contradiction between a conceptual taxonomy or 'natural history' of images (1986: xiv) and an historical account of the emergence of time-image cinema in the post-war context. Indeed, the tension between these two positions is 'so obvious', Marrati observes, 'that it would be hard, even for Deleuze, not to notice it' (2008: 64). Marrati argues, however, in a counter-intuitive manner, that the appearance of contradiction is dissolved once we see that the *Cinema* books articulate Deleuze's *political* philosophy (Marrati 2008: x). Deleuze proposes not merely a conceptual taxonomy and semiology of cinematic images but an analysis of the relationship between '*forms of action and agency*' (2008, x), and a response to the 'problem of the broken link between humans and the world' following the collapse of revolutionary political hopes (whether American or European) (2008: 5). Deleuze's account of the crisis of the action-image is at the same time an analysis of the crisis of History. Any clash between the conceptual taxonomy of images and the historical 'two ages of cinema' is therefore merely apparent. Indeed, Deleuze's ethico-political thought, Marrati argues, is concerned rather with cinema as an artform

giving us 'reasons to believe in this world'; restoring our belief in the latter through an 'immanent conversion of faith' (Marrati 2008: 85–87). From this philosophical point of view, the *Cinema* books are aesthetic-political treatises on the problem of *nihilism*: the loss of *belief in the world* defining our contemporary cultural-historical malaise. Here we find unexpected common ground with Cavell, who approaches film in a similar spirit, namely as an artistic response to the problem of *scepticism*.

Marrati's 'allegorical' reading of Deleuze's *Cinema* books as works in political philosophy is ingenious. However, even if we accept Marrati's reading (which places a heavy burden on the few passages where Deleuze gestures towards history and politics), the problems identified by Rancière remain: how to explain the link between the aesthetics of cinematic images and this historical crisis in agency? And what to make of the 'allegorical' readings of films Deleuze adduces to support this link between aesthetics, history and politics? (Especially given Deleuze's rejection of 'representationalist' accounts of cinema.) Marrati's defence of Deleuze's project does not address Rancière's basic criticism, namely that Deleuze's Bergsonian ontology of images attempts to secure, in one stroke, an 'essence' of cinema that would allow the philosopher to conceptualise image-regimes, narrate the end of cinema, and rescue philosophy's vocation in relation to history, art and politics. We can add to this critique a contemporary observation: the appearance of hybrid forms of narrative cinema in which sensory-motor action and pure optical time-image narrative become 'indiscernible'. Deleuze's historicist thesis looks doubtful given the flourishing of cinema that affirms the play of *mythos* (narrative) and *opsis* (spectacle), classical action-narrative and 'modern' optical and sound situations, in culturally diverse and aesthetically hybrid forms.[13]

Questioning Deleuze's Cine-Philosophy

There are three difficulties that arise in response to Deleuze's cine-philosophical account of the relationship between thought and cinema. The first is an ambiguity in the meaning of 'thought' itself, which refers both to the conventional sense of cognitive engagement and to Deleuze's non-representationalist account of thought attempting to conceptualise 'difference in itself' (see Deleuze 1994). Attempts to think ideas like the 'unity of man and nature' are not the same as

attempts to think a non-representationalist notion of difference via the disruptive shock experience of a modernist cinematic encounter. 'Thought', moreover, as Deleuze uses it appears to be ambiguous between the creative positing of (non-representationalist) concepts and an agentless or subjectless, even 'inhuman', activity, even though it is only through mediating 'thinkers' – which is to say, articulated conceptual discourse, linguistic expressions or artistic works – that such thought can be at all expressed.

The second is that Deleuze's account of the essential link between cinema and thought remains wedded to a certain discourse of 'political modernism' that many might find implausible today (the critical transformation of consciousness and emancipation of subjectivity through revolutionary forms of art). His account of the manner in which cinema 'thinks' retains a belief in the power of cinematic art to effect a transformation of experience or alteration of consciousness, which is itself put under question by the kind of scepticism or nihilism defining contemporary Western cultural-historical sensibilities (see Sinnerbrink 2016a: 64–69). Can we still believe in the power of cinema to restore belief in the world and overcome or restore the 'broken link' between human beings and the world? And on what basis should we accept the idea of such a 'broken link', or that the best response to nihilism involves positing existential 'reasons to believe in this world'? Indeed, the idea of the transformative power of cinema – in the tradition of a revolutionary transformation of consciousness or reinvention of the 'human' – may well be one of the beliefs that has become questionable in our sceptical age. This is not to deny the possibility that cinematic art might still play this redemptive or transformative role in modernity; but to make this the essential task of modern cinema is to overlook the myriad other ways films, whether time-image or movement-image cinema, can contribute to philosophical understanding and ethical experience.

The third is to ask whether Deleuze's existential wager – affirming belief in the world through our aesthetic engagement with the immanent possibilities of embodied experience – is enough to overcome contemporary forms of nihilism. How does this existential-aesthetic wager deal with the very concrete cultural-historical dimensions of the contemporary 'crisis' afflicting moral, social-political and ideological narratives? Can a film-philosophy committed to the idea that cinema can offer an aesthetic remedy to nihilism and scepticism respond to the ethico-political dimensions of this crisis? It is hard to see how a time-image cinema devoted to contemplative seeing and the aesthetic-existential affirmation of existence, however important in other ways, can at the same time offer an adequate response to

the ethical and political demands of our current normative crises (see Bernstein 2012; Sinnerbrink 2016a: 72–76).

Deleuze's conception of the possibilities afforded by a 'cinematic thinking', the idea that film itself 'thinks' or that thought can be expressed through moving images, continues a tradition of film-philosophical thinking stretching from early cinema to the present. It offers a productive contrast with the other major philosophical engagement with cinema that has shaped contemporary film-philosophy, namely Stanley Cavell's claim that film offers a 'moving image of scepticism', a challenge to philosophy and site of ethical engagement to which I now turn.

7

Now, Voyager: Cavell as Film-Philosopher

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Stanley Cavell's unique approach to cinema has put the relationship between film and philosophy at the centre of philosophical inquiry into film.[1] Cavell was the first major Anglophone philosopher of note who dedicated a major part of his work to cinema. As he remarks in *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (1996), film has the capacity to alter 'everything philosophy has said about reality and its representation, about art and imitation, about greatness and conventionality, about judgment and pleasure, about skepticism and transcendence, about language and expression' (Cavell 1996: xii). Although some have taken Cavell's remark as a provocation, prompting criticisms of film's philosophical pretensions and defences of its philosophical contributions, it has rich implications for rethinking the

relationship between cinema and ethics. As D. N. Rodowick observes, Cavell is 'undoubtedly the contemporary philosopher most centrally concerned with the problem of ethics in film and philosophy, above all through his championing of an Emersonian moral perfectionism' (Rodowick n.d.: 1–2). Cavell's cinematic ethics raises not only the question of scepticism and belief but also that of the relationship between cinema, ethical self-transformation and prevailing values within a given cultural-historical context.

In the following chapter, I consider Cavell's unique and influential contribution to film-philosophy: his claim that cinema offers an exemplary case of staging and traversing scepticism, and his exploration of (Emersonian) moral perfectionism, as enacted in particular cinematic genres, notably the 'remarriage comedy' and the 'melodrama of the unknown woman'. Such films, which Cavell interprets in detail, offer a response to (cultural and moral) scepticism via their emphasis on open-ended, creative, individual as well as collective self-transformation. I explore the ethical significance of cinema as a response to scepticism, most vividly portrayed in the genres of remarriage comedy and melodrama of the unknown woman, as a film-philosophical engagement with the problem of modernity. It is not only the successful pursuit of moral perfectionism that marks the ethical contribution of these films, but the thwarting, breakdown or impossibility of realising this path thanks to the normative context within which characters find themselves. The latter tension or ambiguity, moreover, finds expression in melodrama's well-known aesthetic of 'excess' but also serves as a provocation to critical reflection. The limits of Cavell's moral perfectionist cinematic ethics – namely, framing moral perfectionism via its communal and democratic conditions, and thus making explicit the relation between ethics and politics – shall be addressed by way of a contemporary 'melodrama of the unknown woman' that is also a queer romantic drama: Todd Haynes' *Carol* (2015). In this way, we can reflect upon the possibilities as well as the limitations of Cavell's film-philosophical engagement with varieties of epistemic and moral scepticism. In conclusion, I explore parallels and contrasts between Cavell and Deleuze on the question of cinema, belief and how to respond to scepticism and nihilism.

Viewing Worlds: Cavell

Cavell is the other major thinker, along with Deleuze, who is credited with motivating the contemporary philosophical turn in film theory (Elsaesser

2019: 20–21; Elsaesser and Hagener 2010: 8–12; Sinnerbrink 2011b: 4–5). For both thinkers, philosophy and film engage with problems – in particular, scepticism and nihilism – that cut across cultural, aesthetic and ethico-political domains. Both thinkers also argue that philosophy cannot merely be 'applied' to film as its object; rather, film and philosophy enter into a *transformative* relationship that opens up new ways of thinking. As Rodowick observes, Deleuze's work on cinema (like that of Cavell), is concerned with a single question: 'how does a sustained meditation on film and film theory illuminate the relation between image and thought?' (1997: 5) From this perspective, Deleuze and Cavell exemplify two distinctive paths for film-philosophy: conceptualising cinema in response to the historico-philosophical problem of a 'loss of belief in the world' (Deleuze); and acknowledging but also responding to scepticism, both epistemic and moral, via the encounter between film and philosophy, and showing how film can pose questions to philosophy that philosophy is called upon to address (Cavell).

Why Does Film Matter?

First published in 1971, Cavell's *The World Viewed* (1979) is a landmark work in Anglophone philosophy of cinema, being one of the first philosophical studies dedicated to the question of film ontology. Why is this encounter between film and philosophy so important? Cavell's answer is simple: the experience of film affords us a way of contending with s*cepticism* – arguably, *the* problem of modern thought – thereby helping to restore meaning in a culture that still struggles with philosophy's disenfranchisement of the ordinary. With the scientific revolution, transition to secularism, and Enlightenment emphasis on rational autonomy, the ancient problem of scepticism takes on a renewed urgency in the modern age. Modern scepticism – the view that we can have no certain knowledge of the world; that we remain metaphysically isolated from reality/Being – has troubled philosophy since at least Descartes. Modern philosophy has of course tried to vanquish scepticism by showing that objective knowledge *is* possible (mathematics, logic, science); that we can approach *certainty* in some respects about ourselves and the world, but that such claims always remain open to sceptical doubt. Despite the success of modern rationalism in conquering epistemic scepticism, the knowledge that really matters to us – about the self, morality or our relations with others – remains frustratingly uncertain.[2]

Film, for Cavell, literally (cinematically) 'stages' this sceptical concern. The mystery of film is how it can present a visual world of movement and time that captures aspects of our experience of reality but which also remains intriguingly distinct and separate from it; a world that is present to me, that I perceive and experience, but from which I am absent or disconnected. Film shows or displays, moreover, the interplay of presence and absence in the image; making present objects, figures and events that are absent, yet which enjoy a ghostly presence in the image-world. It also shows, however, that this image-world – which Cavell calls 'the world viewed' – is nonetheless *meaningful*; a restoring of the sundered link with the world that has been lost in modernity. From this point of view, Cavell argues, we can view film as 'a moving image of skepticism' (1979: 188). Echoing Bazin, the cinema, whatever other enjoyments it affords, is motivated by our desire for metaphysical connection with the world; it expresses 'the wish for selfhood', like all art (Cavell 1979: 22). Yet it also shows us that we can find this retrieval of meaning only in ordinary experience, however ambiguous or uncertain it may be and however much the spectre of scepticism still haunts it.

Following the tradition of classical film theory, *The World Viewed* commences with an inquiry into the ontology of the cinematic image. Unlike traditional studies, however, Cavell opens with an autobiographical reflection on his motivation for writing the book: to account for the shift from his lived experience of the movies to his philosophical interest in their nature (1979: 3–15). The movies matter to us, perhaps more than any other artform; yet philosophy has hitherto ignored them, regarding them as trivial entertainments (suggesting that philosophy has not yet been properly struck by the provocation to thought that movies enact). Hinting that movies have changed since the 1960s, Cavell situates his own reflections as an attempt to marry philosophical reflection with aesthetic experience. He thus offers a way of thinking about how film, like other arts, now exists 'in the condition of philosophy' (1979: 14), having entered into a condition of *modernism*. The latter, for Cavell, refers to the way that film seeks to renew itself by relating to its own past; the way films seek 'to invite and bear comparison' with past achievements of cinematic history (1979: 216).

So what is film? Inspired by the realism of Panofsky (1977 [1934]) and Bazin (1967), who claimed that the medium of movies refers to 'physical reality as such', or that it 'communicates by way of what is real' (Bazin 1967: 110), Cavell considers the ontological relationship between photography and film. What Panofsky and Bazin mean, Cavell explains, is that the medium of film has a *photographic* basis, and that photographs are *of* a world (1979:

16). When applied to film, their question becomes: 'What happens to reality when it is projected and screened?' (Cavell 1979: 16) This question is linked with the question of how we experience reality more generally, not only how we perceive it but how we interpret, remember or imagine it. As any filmgoer will attest, we recollect films as well (or as poorly) as we do events in our past, or even our dreams. Images from films seen many years past can still haunt me; some images, scenes or characters can become more familiar and significant to us than other people or even one's own memories. So what are we experiencing when we watch a film?

Unlike painting – which represents something in the world – photography and film, for Cavell, do not represent so much as 'capture' things; they present us, 'we want to say, with the things themselves' (Cavell 1979: 17). We recognise here Cavell's version of what we earlier discussed as the 'transparency thesis': that cinematic images are not representations but presentations of what they depict, a view based on the claim that (pre-digital) photography is a realist medium that retains an ontological link between image and referent. Now, a photograph of a landscape is clearly not the same thing as a landscape painting. A portrait of me is a likeness or visual representation; but a photograph is *of* me (not just *like* me). I don't say, 'That's a good likeness of me in front of the Sydney Opera House'; I say, 'That's me in front of the Sydney Opera House' (likewise for the Opera House). Should we then say that photographs present us with 'the thing itself'? But a photo of the Opera House is no building. So what is the ontological link between a photograph and what it depicts? It is not a likeness nor is it like a replica, according to Cavell; it is something more ontologically mysterious – a trace of the past, of a presence that is no longer present for us. In a photograph, an image with its own aura or magic, we see things that are not present. What does this mean?

The photo is present to me; but what it depicts is not. Cavell draws a parallel with sound recordings: when I hear, say, Billie Holiday singing 'Stormy Weather', am I hearing her voice, or merely the *sound* of her voice? The distinction might seem spurious. It would not matter whether I was attending a live performance or watching a filmed recording of her, you might reply, I would still be hearing the sound of Holiday's voice. When I listen to a recording of Billie Holiday, I am listening to a transcription of her voice at the time when it was recorded. What I *hear*, however, is a trace of the past, a singular performance (Billie Holiday performing 'Stormy Weather' at a particular time, in a particular performance), now reproduced in the present (as I listen with pleasure on my stereo). So there is no problem saying that audio recordings reproduce the sound of something that is no longer

present (an instrument, a voice). Can we say the same of photographs? Cavell argues that photographs do not reproduce a 'sight' (or 'look') of something no longer present; rather, they present something that is hard to name, for which a word appears lacking in our language (1979: 19). Objects do not have 'sights' in a way that would account for their likeness in an image (though Plato may disagree). Nor can we say, as some philosophers might, that photos reproduce 'sense-data' (my visual sensation of something). For in that case we could no longer distinguish between the photo and the thing photographed. Is a photograph, as Bazin suggests, therefore like a 'visual mould' of an object? Not really, because the original, Cavell observes, remains *present* in the image. Photographic images, to be sure, are manufactured or 'constructed' images of the world; but what they capture, mechanically and automatically, is the world itself, not a mere likeness of it. It is this mechanism or *automatism* in photography's capturing and reproduction of images that finally satisfies, as Bazin put it, 'our obsession with realism' (quoted in Cavell 1979: 20).

Against contemporary philosophers of film, whose concerns (alas!) are still primarily epistemic and ontological, Cavell, like Bazin, points to the existential human need that motivates our creation of images (whether in painting, photography or film). Photography, Cavell remarks, satisfied a wish, growing in the West since the Reformation, 'to escape subjectivity and metaphysical isolation – a wish for the power to reach this world, having for so long tried, at last hopelessly, to manifest fidelity to another' (1979: 21). After the advent of nihilism or what Nietzsche called 'the death of God', painting and photography – and later, film – aimed to re-establish our sense of connection with the world. These arts aim at a sense of *presentness*; not just of the world's presence to us, but more pressingly, a sense of our presence to it (Cavell 1979: 22). During the course of Western modernity, despite or perhaps due to the rise of science and technology, consciousness became estranged from reality, interposing 'subjectivity between us and our presentness to the world' (Cavell 1979: 22). When subjectivity became what is most properly present to us, individuality became metaphysical isolation. Hence the route taken to connect with the world was via *subjectivity*. This is the path of *romanticism*, whether in art/literature (Blake, Wordsworth) or in philosophy (Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Wittgenstein); a movement that Cavell sums up as 'the natural struggle between representation and the acknowledgment of our subjectivity' (1979: 22).

Here Cavell shows his allegiance with the romanticist response to scepticism or nihilism. Visual art, for Cavell, is precisely a response to

scepticism, a human expression of selfhood against metaphysical isolation, and thus a way of revivifying our sundered sense of connection with the world. Photography overcomes subjectivity in a manner unavailable to painting, namely through *automatism*, which is to say, 'by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction' (Cavell 1979: 23). It maintains the *presentness* of the world by removing us from it; the reality of a photo is present to me whereas I remain absent from it. Photos depict a world that I can know and see but to which I am not present; and such a world is a 'world past', a past world (Cavell 1979: 23). Film or the art of moving images inherits and projects this world; a *screened world* or 'world viewed' that is present to us but for which we *are not*. With this insight into the modern condition – the age of the 'world-image' (as Heidegger puts it) or 'the world viewed' (as Cavell does) – we have an answer to the question as to why movies matter philosophically.

Cavell develops further this contrast between film and photography by considering the different relationships that painting and photography bear to reality. It makes no sense to ask what lies behind an object in a painting, whereas one can always do so with a photograph. A painting, in this regard, *encloses* or *delimits* a world; the limits of the painting (its frame) are the limits of its world (to paraphrase Wittgenstein). Photographs, on the other hand, *do* depict an aspect of the world; we can always ask what lies beyond the limits of the image, beyond its frame, since the cropping of the image by the camera cuts out aspects of the world that could nonetheless have been photographed (Cavell 1979: 24). A painting *is* a world (J. W. Turner's ocean); a photograph is *of* the world (Ansel Adam's landscape) (Cavell 1979: 24). Photographs imply the existence of a world beyond the image, whereas paintings depict a world within the image-frame.[3]

Moving pictures, moreover, screen photographic images of the world: a world that is *screened*, supporting nothing but a projection of light, which Cavell takes in at least two senses. The silver screen both 'screens' me from that world (I am not present to it); and it 'screens' the world from me (removes its physical existence) (Cavell 1979: 24). Unlike a photographic frame, the screened world has no frame or border. Rather, from a phenomenological point of view, the film-world has indefinitely extendible and flexible boundaries, thus allowing filmmakers to avail themselves of all the devices of 'variable framing' (indexing, bracketing and scaling) (Carroll 2008: 124 ff.). The camera, for Cavell, can extend the 'frame' of the film in many ways; it can focus on some aspects or objects, calling attention to salient aspects of objects, events or characters within the film-world, or it can just 'let the world

happen' (Cavell 1979: 25). As far as defining the medium is concerned, Cavell proposes the descriptive definition of film as '*a succession of automatic world-projections*' (1979: 72; italics in original): film captures movement (and time) in the world, within the image and between images composing a film ('succession'), and it does so 'automatically', without direct human intervention, that is, mechanically, thanks to its photographic character. Film captures the ontological reality of a 'world', even a fictional one, by presenting it to us, who remain absent to it, photographically. And it does so via a 'projection' on screen, projecting human figures in a world from which we remain forever absent, thus creating a phenomenological and aesthetic rupture, as well as continuity, with experience (Cavell 1979: 73).

Audience, Actor, Star

As Panofsky noted back in 1934, cinema introduces important differences not only in theatrical versus cinematic performance but also between theatre and cinema audiences (1977). In the theatre, we are not present to the actors but they are present to us; actors are of course aware of the audience but must, by convention, ignore their existence in order to maintain the theatrical illusion (unless breaking 'the fourth wall'). In the cinema, however, we are 'mechanically absent' to the film actors (Cavell 1979: 25), thanks to the manner in which cinematic performance is captured on film. I am present, not to something happening (on the stage), but to something that has happened, which I can now absorb (like a memory or a dream) (Cavell 1979: 26).

All the same, film actors can still address the camera; direct address is not uncommon, whether in modernist or comic film (Bergman's *Summer with Monica* (1953), Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1962), The Marx Brothers in *Duck Soup* (1933) or Frank Underwood [Kevin Spacey] in *House of Cards* (2013–2018)). In these cases, however, we remain 'mechanically absent' from the world of the film even if the screen performer appears to address us 'directly' (it is 'any-viewer-whomsoever' being addressed, rather than me specifically). Is this just because theatre viewing involves 'live' performance, in the presence of real actors, rather than a cinematic performance of actors recorded on film? Although Bazin claimed that we *are* in the presence of actors on screen, as though seeing him or her via a relay of mirrors, for Cavell the situation is more subtle and complex (live television is probably closer to Bazin's 'prosthetic image' or 'relayed mirrors' scenario). Cinematic

images depict human figures; but what does this mean? Projected images of human beings – of 'a human *something*... unlike anything else we know' (Cavell 1979: 26) – raise ticklish (ontological) questions specific to the medium of film.

Take Bette Davis as Margo Channing in Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* (1950). She is clearly, even vividly, present to us on screen; but we are not present to her, for ontological and mechanical reasons. So what (or rather, *who*) is thus present to us? Is it Margo Channing or Bette Davis? 'Both', one wants to say. This mysterious coalescence of character and actor in cinematic performance is, however, far from obvious. Carroll claims that moving images depict actors performing characters, where such characters are projections (cinematic, aesthetic and dramatic, we might say) based on the actor's performance. We see Bette Davis on screen and at the same time behold Margo Channing warning us about the bumpy night ahead. But are things so clear cut? The paradox of cinematic performance, if you will, is *how* actor and character can be co-present within a cinematic performance: how can I be engaged by Margo Channing, yet also perceiving Bette Davis, a 'doubling' that might appear to interfere with my immersive involvement in the fictional world? On the other hand, if actors were merely living visual props for viewers to imagine characters for themselves, as Walton (1990) and others have argued, then we would not identify screen actors and characters as closely as we do. Imagine, for example, Joan Crawford playing Margo Channing; would it still be 'Margo Channing' that we are imagining? (Assuming that what we know of 'Margo Channing' of course depends on what we experience in watching *All About Eve*). That Margo Channing (one wants to say '*the* Margo Channing') is indissociably linked with Bette Davis' stunning performance (as 'Mildred Pierce' is indissociably linked with Joan Crawford). Joan Crawford as 'Margo Channing' would not just be a different actress, hence a different performance; she would be another embodiment of 'Margo Channing', a different character than the one we currently know.[4]

Cavell argues that stage actors work themselves into a role and eventually 'yield' to the character; the actor 'incarnates' the character, playing a role that is analogous to a position on a chessboard or in a sporting game (1979: 27–28). The film actor, by contrast, 'takes on' a character, drawing on his or her temperament, skills, endowments and previous acting roles, but only accepting 'what fits' for the purposes of a particular cinematic performance (1979: 28).[5] The screen performance is the projection of a character 'study' in which the actor's presence continues to 'show through' his or her performance. The character is not fully 'incarnated' but subordinated to the actor's screen

presence. As much as I enjoy Margo Channing's antics, I am always conscious of Bette Davis' performance, and her cinematic presence is what charges Margo's character with such dramatic brio. Cinematic performance involves a complex aesthetic interplay between actor and character (and the actor's previous cinematic roles), which is why a film actor's physiognomy and gestures, his or her capacity for expressive cinematic 'projection', are far more important than traditional stage-acting craft.

Screen 'Types' and Film Genres

The film 'star' thus differs from the stage performer in a number of ways. We follow successive incarnations of the screen actor (rather than his or her characters) from film to film (not repeated performances of a dramatic character, as on the stage). As Cavell observes, after *The Maltese Falcon*, 'Bogart' means 'the figure created in a given set of films' (like *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Casablanca* (1942) or *The Big Sleep* (1946)). Had those films not been made, Bogart as we know him would not exist (even if he had made other films) and the name 'Bogart' would not mean what it does (Cavell 1979: 28). Film stars, unlike stage actors, exist essentially for the camera, hence for our appreciation of them on screen; the creation of a (screen) performer, moreover, is also the creation of a recognisable character 'type' (the vamp, the hard-boiled detective, the criminal mastermind, the action hero, the romantic heroine, the alienated anti-hero and so on). Screen acting is thus inseparable from the great cycles of screen narrative that we call *genres* (Cavell 1979: 29 ff.). Of all the possible aesthetic paths it might have taken, why did film develop into conventional narrative cycles (genres)? We cannot explain this by simply referring to the *technical* or *material* properties of the medium (as Bazin claimed). Nor is it a matter of a cultural or ideological determinism that dictated the hegemonic rise of Hollywood-style narrative; after all, the 'Hollywood style' has been hybridised and transformed in multifarious ways (Bollywood, for example). Rather, the medium, Cavell maintains, has to be created or invented *artistically* by making various possibilities of the medium *significant*, that is, by discovering new ways of making meaning via the inheritance and transformation of cinematic traditions (1979: 68 ff.).

From this point of view, the medium of film comes into its own when the possibilities of screen acting in conventional narrative become explicitly articulated. Indeed, screen actors embody an individuated *type*: an *individuality* that is distinctive from, but also representative of, the ordinary

individual with his or her dominant social role; and an individuated expression of the 'myth of singularity', the narrative fantasy of an individuality that could withstand fate, social circumstance, the materiality of the world itself (Cavell 1979: 35–36). Such types feature in, and support, the enactment and propagation of cinematic genres; secular expressions of mythic narrative cycles, genres constituted a founding artistic discovery, which is to say invention, of the medium of movies.

Indeed, the emergence of narrative cycles as genres populated by types is an expression of the *democratising* tendency of film, its inherent egalitarianism (Cavell 1979: 34–35): the visual equivalence between human figures, objects and settings appearing on the screen (see also Rancière 2006: 8–11). The invention of the medium of film means developing genres expressing types that exploit the various affordances or 'automatisms' of film in artistically satisfying ways. Does Cavell fall foul here of Carroll's rigid ban on 'medium essentialism'? Not quite; there *is* a relationship between the medium of film and its artistic possibilities, but this is a relationship of *creative invention*, of 'finding as founding' in an Emerson spirit, rather than any specious ontological determinism or rigid aesthetic teleology.

As illuminating examples, Cavell cites two classic cinematic comic types (Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton), whose cinematic artistry relies on two essential features of cinematic medium. These features together comprise what he calls 'the world viewed': 1) *the projection of the human image* upon the screen (the screening of the actor as type or individuality rather than as a particular character); and 2) the *ontological equivalence of the human figure* in relation to its physical environment (in relation to the world of inanimate objects, of nature and of larger social forces). Both features of the medium make visual comedy possible on screen. Chaplin uses the '*projected visibility*' of the human image to fine aesthetic effect, his comic tics and gestures expressing 'the sublime comprehensibility of his natural choreography'; and he uses the *ontological equality* between people and objects to great comic effect, a levelling that permits 'his Proustian or Jamesian relationship with Murphy beds and flights of stairs and with cases on runners on tables on rollers' – a Nietzschean heroism of survival, of tightrope walking across the abyss (Cavell 1979: 37). Keaton, too, artfully exploits this projected visibility and ontological equality in his daring comic escapades; his predicaments imbue his melancholy countenance with a 'philosophical mood', while also expressing the 'Olympian resourcefulness of his body', qualities that together render Keaton perhaps 'the only constantly beautiful and continuously hilarious man ever seen' (Cavell 1979: 37).[6]

Cinematic Mythmaking and the 'End of the Myths'

Unlike many contemporary philosophers of film, for whom science holds the key to understanding cinema, Cavell readily acknowledges its 'mythic' quality; its enduring fascination with the creation of images of human beings, and its role as the modern, secular expression of a cultural desire for mythmaking.[7] Despite their disagreements over the medium, Cavell accepts Bazin's account of the 'myth of total cinema' (Bazin 1967: 17–28). This myth expresses the 'idea of and wish for the world re-created in its own image' (Cavell 1979: 39), which film achieves 'automatically' through the *automatisms* of the moving image (the artistic realisation of the various possibilities afforded by the medium). Film fulfils the mythic dream – evident in Plato's Ring of Gyges as much as in Freud's voyeur – of invisible visibility (being able to see all, yet not being seen by others). It satisfies this wish or desire, moreover, without any involvement on our part; I do not have to *do* anything, yet my wish is automatically satisfied, by *magic*, as it were (Cavell 1979: 39). Cinema grants us a power of seeing all while absolving us of responsibility for this power. This magical-technical realisation of the myth of invisible visibility, film's ironic inversion of modern scepticism, thereby becomes 'an expression of modern privacy or anonymity' (Cavell 1979: 40). The 'world's projection' through movies thus parallels, but also questions, our modern sceptical orientation; our 'inability to know' ourselves, others or the world (Cavell 1979: 40–41). Film 'screens' the fact that we experience ourselves as 'displaced' from the world, 'naturalising' this condition of existential displacement from our environment, rendering it meaningful, even pleasurable.

Film and Moral Perfectionism

In his more recent work elaborating cinematic responses to scepticism, Cavell focuses on the remarriage comedy and the melodrama of the unknown woman from the ethical perspective of *moral perfectionism* (Cavell 1981, 1996, 2004). We can define the latter as a post-foundational, non-teleological conception of ethics that foregrounds the creative ethical task of individuals in shaping their conduct and composing their lives as open-ended projects. Drawing on the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson (the

American Nietzsche), Cavell suggests that narrative cinema is ideally suited for exploring characters embarking on a quest for self-knowledge or experience of creative self-transformation; the ethical process, as Nietzsche described, of 'becoming who one is' independent of canonical moral rules or abstract theoretical reflection. What is distinctive about moral perfectionism, from a philosophical perspective, is its eschewal of universalist moral principles, a utilitarian calculus of consequences, or the cultivation of culturally valorised moral virtues, in favour of an individualist, experimental, 'existential' commitment to freedom and autonomous self-transformation. Moral perfectionism's creative response to ethics in the absence of metaphysical foundations, rationalistic calculation or rigid moral principles, makes it an ideal ethical response to scepticism on the moral-cultural plane.

So what is moral perfectionism? According to Cavell, it is not a distinct moral theory but rather a dimension of moral thinking or 'register of moral life' that can be found in a variety of philosophical texts and traditions (from Plato's *Republic*, Emerson's essays and Nietzsche's aphorisms, to Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*) (Cavell 2004: 12–13). We can describe it as an 'anti-foundationalist' way of conceptualising ethical experience, one that has a practical, 'existential' emphasis on the importance of making oneself intelligible to others, of transforming oneself throughout one's life and of practising 'philosophy as a way of life' (Cavell 2004: 13; see Hadot 1995, 2005). Perhaps because of its broader cultural significance, however, moral perfectionism remains a neglected way of thinking ethics within academic philosophy compared with the dominant theories of morality (Kantian universalism, utilitarianism and Aristotelian virtue ethics). Although it reaches back to traditions of ancient Greek thought, it also resonates with modern strands of romantic-existentialist thinking. In this respect, it stands in stark contrast with the major traditions of moral philosophy and more academic forms of moral inquiry.

Cavell's account of moral perfectionism thus offers an alternative perspective on prevailing moral theories, one focused on achieving self-understanding and ethical self-transformation. It advocates a creative shaping of one's own existence without recourse to pre-given moral principles, social conventions or universal duties. At the same time, it does not deny the possibility of scepticism but in responding to it strives to avoid overly speculative metaphysical commitments that dog other forms of moral thinking (which tend to collapse into scepticism or even nihilism). Unlike Plato's conception of perfectionism (a teleological account of striving to attain a transcendent ideal), Cavell's 'non-teleological' moral perfectionism

involves an autonomous, practical, 'existential' quest to become what one is, to approach, as Emerson put it, one's 'unattained but attainable self':

> In Emerson and Thoreau's sense of human existence, there is no question of reaching a final state of the soul but only and endlessly taking the next step to what Emerson calls 'an unattained but attainable self' – a self that is always and never ours – a step that turns us not from bad to good, or wrong to right, but from confusion and constriction toward self-knowledge and sociability.
>
> Cavell 2004: 13

For Cavell, moral perfectionism is the mode of thinking that best defines the moral-ethical significance of the two genres of Hollywood film analysed in *Pursuits of Happiness* and *Contesting Tears*: the remarriage comedy and the melodrama of the unknown woman. These films focus on couples seeking acknowledgment and self-education as to their desire, transforming themselves in a manner that can be either comic or tragic. These are films that remain related to earlier dramatic and literary traditions (Shakespearean comedy, 19th-century social-domestic drama) but that do not fit readily in any of the three major categories of academic moral philosophy (Kantian universalism, utilitarianism or virtue ethics). They are films that explore the question of critical self-transformation, the characters' desire to reinvent themselves and to explore the possibility of a transfigured world in which new ways of being with one another might be possible. In this regard, they remain closely related to Emersonian perfectionism, which does not strive for a utopian ideal, nor dismiss the existing world as inherently meaningless. Rather, in calling these films 'Emersonian', Cavell suggests that they participate in the perfectionist quest for self-transformation within a world that could be itself transformed, however partially, by reinventing our relations with others within a democratic community.

So how does moral perfectionism relate to film? We can identify at least three strands: 1) through cinema's egalitarian capacity to thematise and reveal the ordinary in all its rich texture of meaning; 2) through the development of narrative film and of specific genres that explore the themes of self-transformation, acknowledging others and either reconciling with or transforming the world; and 3) through film's capacity to transfigure human figures as depicted on screen, to capture and convey emotional expression and psychological complexity through gesture and performance. All three aspects are at play in the genres of remarriage comedy and the melodrama of the unknown woman. Indeed, it is through these films' cinematic presentation of singular characters confronting the ordinary moral challenges of love and

friendship, freedom and fulfilment, recognition and reinvention, that an ethical experience of moral perfectionism becomes vividly manifest.

Moral Perfectionism and Remarriage Comedy

As remarked, Cavell's two major philosophical works on film explore two related Hollywood genres, the remarriage comedy and the melodrama of the unknown woman (which Cavell is the first to identify). These genres transform the theme of marriage, either as a utopian possibility of mutual acknowledgment in the comedies, or as a block to the woman's quest for self-knowledge in the melodramas. In his earlier books, however, Cavell does not explicitly link either genre with Emersonian moral perfectionism, although Emerson's thought remains, as ever, a constant reference point. Rather, he draws attention to the manner in which such films thematise their condition as visual media, their inheritance of literary and dramatic traditions, their relationships with other films and constitution of a genre, and their reflection on morally relevant themes, including the Emersonian critique of conformity and the possibility of an egalitarian relationship between the sexes. It is only in *Cities of Words* that Cavell explicitly recasts both genres as participating in the philosophical discourse of moral perfectionism present in modern culture since Shakespeare and Milton, Ibsen and Eliot, Emerson and Nietzsche.

What are remarriage comedies? Cavell (2005b: 136) addresses these films as a particular subgenre, exemplified by a selection of 'seven talkies made in Hollywood between 1934 and 1949': *It Happened One Night* (1934), *The Awful Truth* (1937), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *His Girl Friday* (1940), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *The Lady Eve* (1941), and *Adam's Rib* (1944). Although they share many features with other romantic comedies, these 'remarriage comedies' are also distantly related to Shakespearean romances like *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. Unlike classical comedy and romance, where a young couple is shown 'overcoming obstacles to their love and at the end achieving marriage', remarriage comedies commence with a mature couple, getting or threatening to get their divorce, so that 'the drive of the narrative is to get the original pair together *again*' (Cavell 2004: 4). They are distinguished from other versions of romantic comedy (related to what Northrop Frye called 'new comedy') in which a male character pursues his

beloved and battles familial and social barriers to their desired marriage. Resonating with Frye's account of 'old comedy', in the remarriage comedies it is the woman who is the focus of the narrative, except that now she embarks on a 'sentimental journey' to educate herself as to her desire, deciding whether the man in question is a suitable partner for her project of self-transformation. These films explore the concept of conversation, the ethical idea of marriage as a 'meet and happy conversation' (as Milton put it in his famous tract on divorce). They explore forms of social and personal exchange in which each partner acknowledges the other in his or her uniqueness, yet where each also provides the other with an educative perspective as to the possibilities allowing for a transformation of his or her self-identity. This raises the question of whether the relationship of equality between the sexes envisaged by the couple is realisable within the social, cultural and ethical norms of the community in which the couple find themselves. The utopian aspect of these comedies thus lies not only in their exploration of a mutually transformative relationship between the sexes, but also in imagining a form of democratic community in which self-reliance and interpersonal intimacy can be mediated with social freedom and political equality.

The remarriage motif, as Cavell remarks, is prompted by the changed situation of marriage, which is 'no longer assured or legitimised by church or state or sexual compatibility or children' but rather by the 'willingness for remarriage, a way of continuing to affirm the happiness of one's initial leap' (Cavell 2005b: 137). Marriage, in other words, is at once a romantic and an ethical relationship sustained by an existential will to repeat one's commitment to seek happiness through mutual acknowledgment with an equal. The focus is not only on the question of marriage but on how the latter is linked with the self-education of the woman. Through these experiences, she learns the true nature of her desire, seeking to establish her self-identity, and openness towards the future, through a process of mutual acknowledgment between her and her partner. The couple's trials are carried comically thanks to virtuoso dialogue and artful performance; their mutual adventures take them from the city to the country (the Shakespearean 'green world'), where the obstacles to self-realisation through acknowledgment, hence to remarriage, are overcome. What the couple discover, finally, is that they are indeed 'made for each other', but only after having committed themselves, through 'happy and meet conversation', to educating themselves, and thus transforming and reinventing themselves, in felicitous partnership with one another.

By contrast, melodramas of the unknown woman, such as Ophüls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), Cukor's *Gaslight* (1944), Rapper's *Now,*

Voyager (1942) and King Vidor's *Stella Dallas* (1937), appear to negate key elements of the remarriage comedy, notably the institution of marriage itself. Within these films, the idea of marriage as a route to self-creation is 'transcended and perhaps reconceived' (Cavell 2004: 6). Indeed, the route to self-creation is not through marriage but involves, rather, a 'metamorphosis': a radical, 'melodramatic' change in the identity of the woman that takes place independently of any conversation or marital commerce with the man, and which draws its nourishment from the otherwise marginalised 'world of women' (Cavell 2004: 6). It is the woman's education towards self-reliance, and her subsequent rejection of marriage, that stands in sharpest contrast with the remarriage comedy. Nonetheless, both genres share an underlying commitment to (Emersonian) moral perfectionism, namely, by 'working out the problematic of self-reliance and conformity, or of hope and despair', in relation to the task of individual self-transformation (Cavell 1996: 9).

Cavell insists, moreover, that we can accommodate the contrasts between the comedies and the melodramas within the moral perfectionist frame, the former by offering an idealised egalitarian version of marriage, the latter by questioning traditional conceptions of marriage in relation to the task of achieving independence beyond socially allotted roles. The remarriage comedies 'envisage a relation of equality between human beings', which Emerson described as 'a relation of rightful attraction, of expressiveness, and of joy'; the melodramas of the unknown woman, by contrast, envision 'the phase of the problematic of self-reliance that demands this expressiveness and joy first in relation to oneself' (Cavell 1996: 9). The latter involves a kind of excessive or 'melodramatic' doubt, or passage through scepticism, that leads the woman beyond sceptical despair and towards a fragile recovery of herself and the world. Both subgenres allegorise these aspects of scepticism and its overcoming in relation to the problem of marriage. Both traverse the possibility of sceptical doubt over our relationship to the world, our capacity for self-knowledge, our ability to know and understand one another, through comic and tragic explorations of romantic relationships, understood as expressions of the potential for acknowledgment within the everyday and the domestic. These are some of the reasons behind Cavell's otherwise surprising claim that, contrary to appearances, scepticism, understood here as 'the threat to the ordinary', should show up in fiction's favourite threats to forms of marriage, namely 'in forms of melodrama and of tragedy' (Cavell 1996: 10).

As critics have remarked, this is one of the more questionable aspects of Cavell's reading of the melodramas and romances, particularly with regard to the question of gender relations (Sinnerbrink 2016a: 123–125; Willett

2008; Williams 1984). Indeed, I would modify Cavell's claim and assert that, if melodrama is the negation of remarriage comedy, then within melodrama the moral perfectionist path is blocked or thwarted (the possibility of finding and following such an ethical path towards independence is put into question). The woman's quest for self-transformation is compromised within this world, which itself becomes the object of a critical reflection; the constraints and conflicts to which she is subject, moreover, generate the hyperbolic emotionalism and aesthetic excess for which the genre is famous.

Romantic Love and Moral Imperfectionism: *Carol* as Melodrama of the Unknown Woman

One way to explore this claim further, and to suggest how a revised moral perfectionism might work, is to offer a Cavellian perspective on a contemporary 'melodrama of the unknown woman'. Todd Haynes' *Carol* (2015) is a critically acclaimed romance and melodrama based on Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Price of Salt* (published in 1952 under a pseudonym and republished in 1990 under Highsmith's name with the title *Carol*). The screenplay was written by Phyllis Nagy (who had been friends with Highsmith) and adapts the novel brilliantly for the screen. Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara star as the romantic couple: Carol Aird, a glamorous society woman and mother undergoing a difficult divorce, and Therese Belivet, a younger woman working part-time in the toy department of Frankendale's (a Department Store based on Bloomingdale's) while pursuing photography. As a lesbian romance combining elements of the maternal melodrama, the film shifts focus from the perspective of the naïve Therese towards that of the sophisticated Carol, while exploring different facets of their relationship. Both women, however, are shown in their shared vulnerability, subtly articulated passion and suppressed desire, trying to find ways to express their love within a world that refuses to recognise or legitimate it. The film's elegant visual style – its evocative use of colour, décor, costume, music and setting – provide expressive aesthetic means to articulate the emotional dynamics of a relationship that defies traditional prohibitions on permissible paths to perfectionist self-transformation through romantic love for, and between, women.

Set in New York City in 1952–1953, but also venturing further afield into the Midwest (Ohio), the film explores not only the life-transforming experience of falling in love, but also the challenges of same-sex love in a world where it remains suppressed and stigmatised. The film features many elements that we can identify with Cavell's moral perfectionism, notably the quest for the characters to transform themselves, to choose how they want to live, what kind of people they aspire to be, as a romantic couple struggling to articulate their love within the conservative constraints of 1950s New York society. Chiming with Cavell's observations of the genre, both women undergo a 'metamorphosis': a radical, 'melodramatic' change in identity that takes place independently of any conversation or marital commerce with a male character, and which is centred on the otherwise marginalised 'world of women' (Cavell 2004: 6). As a melodramatic romance with a queer perspective (McKee 2018; James 2018; V. L. Smith 2018; White 2015), it offers a way of exploring what we might call *moral imperfectionism*: the difficulties involved in pursuing a moral perfectionist path of self-transformation within a socially constrained, morally prejudicial, imperfect social and cultural world.

Cavell's account of the melodrama of the unknown woman acknowledges that it offers something akin to the 'negative' version of moral perfectionism. A woman who is both unknown (to herself) and to us (as various aspects of her character or motivation remained concealed) undergoes a transformative experience in which she begins to explore who she is, and has to choose what kind of life she will lead, typically either rejecting the path of marriage, questioning her traditional feminine role as mother, or choosing to venture on a new way of life on her own terms, independent of marriage or the world of men. Unlike remarriage comedies, in which the woman needs to choose which partner will help educate her as to her desire, help her find her new identity, in the melodrama of the unknown woman she attempts to find a new path that might allow her to reconcile motherhood with independence, romantic relationships with family or career, personal authenticity with social acknowledgment or moral obligations. The women in these melodramas experiment with the possibilities available within their social world to become 'something else besides a mother' (to quote Stella in *Stella Dallas*). Although Cavell identifies this genre or subgenre within classic Hollywood melodramas of the 1930s and 1940s, it remains a feature of melodramas that other critics and theorists have explored in regard to more recent European and American cinema (Rushton 2010, 2014; Staat 2016).

Many of these elements are present in Todd Haynes' *Carol*, which focuses on the passionate but thwarted romantic relationship between a wealthy and

experienced New York woman trying to leave her marriage and an inexperienced young salesgirl cum photographer making her way in the world. The film presents its story initially from the perspective of Therese – as in Highsmith's novel – but gradually shifts perspective towards Carol, whose difficult battle with her patriarchal husband Harge [Kyle Chandler] over the custody of their daughter Rinny threatens to destroy the women's relationship and casts Carol in an increasingly vulnerable role. We follow the subtle but unmistakable signs of desire shaping their meeting – the chance encounter at a department store toy counter at Christmas, their exchanged glances signalling both attraction and uncertainty, Carol asking Therese for advice on what to buy her young daughter for Christmas, leaving her leather gloves on the counter 'by accident' – and then follow the blossoming of their relationship, however furtive and hidden, until its near destruction thanks to the efforts of Carol's jealous and wounded husband. If this had been a more traditional or conventional 'melodrama of the unknown woman', as those Cavell studies, the story would likely have followed Carol's trajectory, her failed attempts to find happiness in some alternative kind of life, having sacrificed her daughter and, most likely, her hopes of happiness for a tragically 'impossible' love.

As a lesbian love story, however, *Carol* combines these elements with romance, the experience of love with its anxieties, ecstasies and obsessions, exploring how romantic love between two women might be possible within an intolerant, prejudicial world.[8] As remarked, Therese is an ingénue, still unformed, finding her way in life, attracted to, but not quite comprehending, the magnetic allure of the more experienced, worldly Carol. Both women undergo a shared experience of love that is profound and transformative, and both come to understand themselves and the possibility of a shared life together that will require invention and independence. The fact that this is a lesbian love affair, one that challenges many 1950s boundaries of moral prejudice and social convention – not only concerning heterosexuality but boundaries of age, class, parenthood and social experience – makes the romance between Therese and Carol both transformative and tragic, passionate and political. The film also combines elements of the 'remarriage' motif with the melodrama, with the younger woman having to decide whether to see Carol again after the seeming demise of their relationship, whether to recommit to their love and live together as a couple, the film ending with a moment of possible reconciliation and fragile sense of shared futurity.

I have chosen to focus on *Carol* because it raises an important issue that has dogged Cavell's accounts of the more 'traditional' (heterosexual)

melodramas and remarriage comedies: the asymmetry between the woman's moral perfectionist quest or transformative ethical trajectory and the man's relatively static, unchanging status and experience, as though she has to learn the nature of her desire in order to become who she is, whereas the male characters, by and large, do not (see Sinnerbrink 2016a: 123–125). As a lesbian romance, there are elements of the melodrama of the unknown woman in both protagonists: not only Therese but Carol too is presented as, and to an extent remains, an unknown woman but one who clearly also undergoes a profound shift or transformation of perspective thanks to her relationship with Therese. Both women are caught between worlds: Therese between the worlds of photography, journalism, the student bohemian set and Carol's world of social privilege and bourgeois propriety; and Carol between the worlds of motherhood, married respectability, and the possibility of an alternative world that neither she nor Therese can yet name or describe. Therese's world offers the possibility of a career in photography, being part of the (male) world of journalism, but also relationships with women that may have to remain clandestine and fleeting (the young woman who appears interested in her at a friend's party towards the end of the film). Carol renounces the lie of claiming that her homosexual affair was a psychological aberration due to mental distress brought about by her husband's harsh conduct, claiming in a moving speech before the divorce lawyers that she freely chose this affair and that she would rather give up custody of her daughter Rinny (while insisting on visiting rights) than continue to live a lie that 'goes against my grain'.

There are no clear alternatives, however, available for either woman to find genuine acknowledgment, their shared love having to remain concealed and ambiguous, furtive and discreet, while also claiming subtle forms of social visibility and moral acknowledgment.[9] At the same time, Therese and Carol have the possibility of inventing a new path, the open possibility of finding a way of life that would allow them to live their love and transform each other within a world that remains marked by ideological, moral and social constraints. Their relationship nonetheless offers a more mutual exchange than many of the more traditional melodramas Cavell reflects upon, a genuinely transformative relationship in a reciprocal sense, educating both women in different ways so as to enable them to become who they are, despite the prejudices they face and the uncertain acknowledgment they seek. As remarked, their relationship also has elements of the 'remarriage' theme: Therese must choose again, in her own way, whether to recommit to her relationship with Carol, this time more autonomously, with the benefit

of experience. She knows that it may mean abandoning her place within her current social milieu and embarking on an uncertain life together, the two women having to find or invent ways to live and express their love in a world that will continue to stymie or thwart it.

The film's expressive visual style has often been noted and praised (W. Metz 2016). There are numerous shots incorporating various forms of framing and reflection (using car windows, mirrors, glass doors, window frames, interior/exterior thresholds). There are shots using abstraction as well as partial obscuring of vision (close shots within a car on a rainy night, of hands, faces and arresting objects within a carefully controlled frame) and shots that foreclose background in favour of focused intimacy (the withholding of establishing shots or wider framings and use of shallow focus in order to emphasise textures, fabrics, jewellery, clothing and make-up, not to mention Blanchett's and Mara's facial expressiveness). All of these stylistic choices contribute to showing the inner emotional states of the characters as well as the interplay between image and world, interior and exterior, social self-presentation and sensuous inner feeling. The expressive and intimate visual style of the film helps convey the ambiguous imbrication of image and desire, complicating the characters' manoeuvring of the dialectic between 'illicit' forms of desire and deadening social convention.

Dialogue in the film is muted, understated, punctuated by pauses and silences, but also filled with subtle facial expressions, significant gestures and telling glances. When Carol and Therese sit down for cocktails and lunch in a discreetly lit restaurant booth, ostensibly to thank Therese for returning Carol's leather gloves, the scene focuses closely on their face-to-face encounter in the expressively lit, evocative restaurant setting. The dialogue is both formal and intimate; each phrase Carol utters having to be at once conventional and suggestive. As their meals arrive, Carol asks what Therese does on Sundays, to which she replies, 'nothing', asking Carol the same question in turn, to which Carol gives the same reply, with a certain emphatic note inflecting her otherwise languid, sophisticated diction. After a pause, Carol invites Therese to visit her on Sunday, barely able to glance at Therese directly, combining a casual politeness with anxious poignancy. The shift in tone from Carol's haughty elegance, now more intimate and vulnerable, and from Therese's doe-eyed innocence to her subtle frankness in accepting Carol's offer without hesitation, while also hinting that she understands what it really means, is all conveyed through tone and gesture, glances and intonation. Carol glances briefly up at Therese, who is now smiling openly, Carol adopting her feline suggestive smile in return, gazing briefly in

admiration and perplexity at Therese. 'What a strange girl you are'. 'Why?' Therese asks innocently, 'Flung out of space', Carol remarks, almost whispering to herself.

This kind of subtle but suggestive exchange, communicating at the level of interpersonal expression and shared affect rather than explicit dialogue or action, is emblematic of their relationship. The careful framing, attention to visual detail and aesthetic mood evoking longing as well as fascination, anxiety as well as desire, is a remarkable achievement of the film. Style and substance perfectly complement one another, combining artfully to express the 'moral perfectionist' desire to transform oneself in partnership with an Other, where this transformative ethic of open-ended becoming becomes complicated thanks to both the ambiguity of romantic love and the social constraints of the characters' world. Like so many melodramas, visual style and aesthetic 'excess' stand in for, or supplement and intensify, what cannot be openly communicated or explicitly articulated. Drawing on masters such as Sirk but adding the restraint of tragic romance (as in Lean's *Brief Encounter*, an explicit reference point for Haynes[10]), *Carol* shows how the moral perfectionist quest, within the context of a lesbian romance, necessarily encounters the prejudices and prohibitions of a straight world that cannot openly acknowledge alternative forms of love and desire.

Carol shows us both the possibilities and limits of the melodrama of the unknown woman multiplying the ethical dimensions of the romantic relationship. By following the mutually transformation of two women in love, rather than the asymmetrical trajectory of the woman and relative stasis of the man in traditional melodramas, *Carol* highlights the struggle for acknowledgment that the couple will experience together within a socially imperfect world. The ethics of moral perfectionism at one level defines the lovers' quest, their shared experiment to find out who they are and what they might become together, while also stressing the failure of this path to allow these women to pursue their love without fear of exposure, censure or sacrifice. To its credit, *Carol* eschews the conventional path of ultimately 'punishing' its queer characters for their transgressive desire, opting for a more affirmative yet ambiguous denouement that suggests how the transformative experience of romantic love between women may yet make possible the invention of new ways of living. It does so, moreover, while acknowledging the uncertainty and difficulty of achieving this within a world that continues to constrain or limit the possibilities of moral perfectionism for individuals who do not conform to social and cultural norms of gender, sexuality or desire.

Recalling Cavell's 'classic' melodramas of the unknown woman, *Carol* both explores and extends the dialectic between acknowledgment and rejection, individual self-realisation and the satisfaction of desire, the quest to become who one is in a world bent on denying that quest. Carol and Therese embark on a reciprocal form of self-transformation, a moral perfectionist rejection of the world of marriage and men, struggling to invent a new mode of existence and form of community for themselves, while contending with the unavoidable prejudice they will face in living a queer life together. We might describe *Carol*, in short, as a *self-critical* melodrama of the unknown woman, one that, by transposing Cavell's model to a same-sex romance, reveals both the possibilities and the constraints, the promises and disappointments, of moral perfectionism in an imperfect world.

Forking Paths: Cavell and Deleuze on the 'End of Film'

Already in *The World Viewed*, one finds Cavell reflecting on the end and future of Hollywood, reflections that resonate strikingly with those of Deleuze on the difference between pre- and post-war cinema. Cavell too notes the shift in cinematic practice since the war, commenting on the 'end of the myths' and 'loss of conviction' that sustained classical Hollywood narrative and genres:

> I assume it is sufficiently obvious that these ways of giving significance to the possibilities of film – the media of movies exemplified by familiar Hollywood cycles and plots that justify the projection of types – are drawing to an end. And this means. . . that they no longer naturally establish conviction in our presentness to the world.
>
> Cavell 1979: 60

Like Deleuze, the crisis signalled by the exhaustion of genres and 'end of the myths' is also a crisis of belief, the loss of a sense of connection with the world. Deleuze describes this phenomenon as a 'loss of belief in the world', Cavell as a loss of 'conviction in our presentness to the world'. They amount to a shared philosophical-cultural diagnosis, which we can express as an acknowledgment of the effects of *nihilism* or (moral-cultural) *scepticism*. For both thinkers, moreover, this is not a cause for despair so much as an occasion for thought: to understand the source and significance of this crisis in narrative and genre, and to explore the possibilities that contemporary

cinema has begun to realise in its various attempts to question the nature and prospects of the (mutating) medium of film.

Narrative film since the 1960s and 1970s, according to Cavell, has moved away from the traditional Hollywood emphasis on genres and types, that is to say, from the expression of generic types or culturally resonant individualities. Indeed, Cavell comments on the recycling of traditional narratives, the hyperbolic inflation of received techniques and the seeming 'interchangeability' of film actors, characters and plots (1979: 69–72). It is as though film had lost conviction in its own aesthetic and mythmaking power; as though it were estranged from its own history and thus from its future – Cavell's version of Deleuze's complaint against the ubiquity of cinematic, psychic and cultural *clichés*. Again, for both Deleuze and Cavell, the future of the art of film turns on *belief*; belief in the possibilities of the medium, in inheriting and renewing its own traditions, in having something meaningful to offer to a cultural milieu afflicted by a diffuse, pervasive and inarticulate scepticism.[11]

Like Deleuze, but from an American perspective, Cavell also identifies a post-war break with the belief in individual and collective agency. Following the traumatic historical experience and moral disorientation brought about by WWII, the Cold War and Vietnam, many of the myths of cinema – as of history, politics and morality – have been shattered:

> These beliefs flowered last in our films about the imminence and the experience of the Second World War, then began withering in its aftermath – in the knowledge, and refusal of knowledge, that while we had rescued our European allies, we could not preserve them; that our enemies have prospered; that we are obsessed with the ally who prospered and prepared to enter any pact so long as it is against him; that the stain of atomic blood will not wash and that its fallout is nauseating us beyond medicine, aging us very rapidly.
>
> Cavell 1979: 63

Films such as Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) and Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* (1964) readily come to mind. Some of this historical loss of belief, however, is also due to a more positive shift in social mores and cultural sensibilities. We no longer believe, for example, in sexist depictions of women, which opposed beauty and intelligence, intimacy and demonstrativeness (Cavell, 1979: 63–64); nor in the demand for the bullish machismo of men who must be strong, silent and brooding, or else upstanding, outspoken and heroic (Cavell 1979: 67). The possibilities of the body, again anticipating Deleuze, now provide possibilities for new expressions of selfhood that promise a renewal and reinvention of types – both male and female – involving

the cinematic 'myth of youth', the 'vanity of personal freedom' and the democratic athleticism of the body (Cavell 1979: 68). Despite these signs of renewal, the degeneration of film's erstwhile conviction in its own aesthetic possibilities, in its capacity to discover and deploy the 'automatisms' of the medium (see Trahair 2014), signals its belated and uncertain entry into the condition of *modernism*.

Here one might ask whether such signs of modernist cinematic self-reflection are really so recent. Arguably, film has always been 'modern', concerned to reflect on its own history ('movies come from other movies', as Cavell observes), and thus able to renew itself in relation to its own historical traditions. Film has always been modern and pre-modern at once, synthesising traditional narratives with reflections on genre, the history of film and cultural mythologies. Indeed, cinema, we can say, is an expression of what Rancière calls the modern *aesthetic regime* of the arts, which combines elements of an ethical concern with the social-cultural use of images, an emphasis on representational narrative and an egalitarian aesthetic of experimentation across all possible genres, styles and subject-matters (2004, 2006: 7–11). Whatever the case historically and culturally, contemporary film, in its troubled self-consciousness, cannot avoid asking the inescapably philosophical question, 'What is film?' Or better, 'What becomes of film in a sceptical age?' It must retrieve and reinvent the possibilities of its still evolving medium, now turned digital, and in doing so will be 'asking exactly whether, and under what conditions, it can survive' (Cavell 1979: 72).

Both Cavell and Deleuze ground their respective paths of film-philosophy in the cultural-philosophical crises in meaning that go by the names of scepticism or nihilism. Both thinkers see cinema as offering creative responses to this shared problem, whether through the invention of new images and styles of narrative film, or film styles and genres in which scepticism is both enacted and overcome. Both also point to the shift in film during the course of the previous century, from a classical to a post-classical phase in which film 'exists in the condition of philosophy'. The latter designates a cinematic *modernism* in which film 'has lost its natural relation to its history' (Cavell 1979: 72), and thus strives to invent new cinematic myths, narrative styles and artistic uses of the medium. Where both thinkers differ is in their particular presentation of the film-philosophy relationship: Deleuze's taxonomy of images draws on a plurality of film examples to instantiate a conceptual framework articulating the shift from movement- to time-image cinema.[12] Cavell's philosophical readings of particular films

perform singular forms of philosophical film criticism that show, rather than tell us, what the relationship between film-philosophy might become, in light of film's vocation to project and overcome scepticism at once. This fork in the paths opened up by Cavell and Deleuze thus leaves us with a tantalising question: can films 'do philosophy' in a distinctively cinematic way?

8

Scenes from a Marriage: On the Idea of Film as Philosophy

Chapter Outline

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The recent 'philosophical turn' in film theory is often described as commencing during the 1990s, thanks to the growing reception of works by Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze. Thomas Elsaesser, for example, credits Deleuze's *Cinema* books as having inaugurated the current wave of interest in film and philosophy, while Cavell is credited as the first major Anglophone philosopher to make cinema central to his philosophical work (Elsaesser and Hagener 2010: 8–12, 187). Both thinkers articulate the possibility of a mutually productive encounter between film and philosophy in complex ways. How are we to understand this film-philosophy relationship? Are film and philosophy contraries or complementaries, friends or foes? One of the more original contributions to contemporary aesthetics is the idea that film can engage in its own distinctive kind of thinking: the idea of film *as* philosophy. Defenders of the 'film as philosophy' thesis have argued

that films are capable of screening philosophical thought-experiments (Wartenberg 2007); that film can philosophise on a variety of topics, including reflection on its own status, in ways comparable to philosophy (Mulhall 2002, 2008); or that film has its own affective ways of thinking that alter the manner in which philosophy can be experienced (Frampton 2006). Critics of the 'film as philosophy' idea, by contrast, have argued that such claims are merely metaphorical: for these critics, film, as a visual narrative art, does not give reasons, make arguments or draw conclusions; hence it cannot be understood as 'philosophical' in the proper sense (Baggini 2003; Russell 2006). Or given the ambiguity of film narrative, if there are philosophical aspects to a film, these are usually subordinate to its artistic and rhetorical ends (M. Smith 2006). Alternatively, critics argue that any philosophy to be gleaned from a film is either due to the philosophical acumen of the interpreter, or else is confined to the expression of an explicit aesthetic intention on the part of its maker(s) (Livingston 2006, 2009a). The difficulty with such contentions, however, is that they often assume a too narrow or reductive conception of what counts as philosophy, or else fail to reflect on the variety of ways in which film and philosophy – or indeed philosophy and art – can be related. My suggestion is that the most productive way of exploring the idea of film as philosophy is as an invitation to rethink the hierarchical relationship between philosophy and art. The encounter between film and philosophy invites us to explore novel ways in which our conventional understanding of philosophy, and aesthetic receptivity to new kinds of experience, might be renewed and transformed.

Taking my lead from this claim, I analyse the recent interest in the 'film as philosophy' thesis: the idea that film does not simply reflect philosophical themes but can engage in philosophising, broadly construed, in an independent manner. This could be a true marriage, provided both parties are acknowledged as equals whose union preserves their particular differences. Like any marriage, it works best when film is acknowledged as equal yet different, rather than as unruly pupil or intellectual subordinate. I also consider some of the debates that have arisen concerning 'bold' versus 'moderate' versions of the film as philosophy thesis, as well as offer some critical reflections on more recent contributions to film-philosophy (D. N. Rodowick, for example) that argue for the ethical, political, as well as philosophical contributions of cinema to contemporary social-political debates and moral-cultural understanding.

The Idea of Film as Philosophy

The field of philosophical aesthetics is long accustomed to the argumentative use of exemplary works of art to illustrate a theoretical point, clarify an argument or support an inquiry. Much work in recent philosophy of film bears out this observation, with philosophers typically adducing aptly chosen films in the course of discussing philosophically relevant topics. Indeed, philosophers have long accepted the idea that films, like other artforms, can contribute to philosophical reflection, whether by illustrating philosophical ideas, exploring situations and problems of general philosophical interest or by eliciting sophisticated criticism and analysis by suitably engaged theorists.

In recent decades, however, a number of philosophical film theorists have advanced a bolder thesis: the idea that film not only provides handy pedagogical illustrations or a lively stimulus to philosophical reflection, but can engage in philosophy in a manner comparable to, although differing from, philosophy itself. Apart from work influenced by Deleuze and Cavell, the most well-known exponents of this view – the 'film as philosophy' thesis – include Stephen Mulhall (2002, 2008), Daniel Frampton (2006), Thomas Wartenberg (2007), D. N. Rodowick (2007a, 2007b, 2014, 2015), Robert Pippin (2010, 2012, 2017, 2020), and Robert Sinnerbrink (2011a, 2011c). Each of these film-philosophers offers a distinctive version of the 'film as philosophy' thesis, whether more or less bold, moderate or, for some, 'bogus'. The debate itself continues unabated, with new contributions, criticisms, refinements and elaborations appearing in recent years (Davies 2008, 2019; McClelland 2011, 2019; Neiva 2019; see also the other contributions in Rawls, Neiva and Gouveia 2019). I will address some of these (focusing on Davies' 2019 contribution) in the concluding part of this section. I shall also return to the idea of 'cinematic thinking' in Part III, as a way of defending the idea of 'film as philosophy' by emphasising the affective potential of the 'aesthetic dimension' of cinematic works as ways of opening new paths for thinking, forms of ethical experience and transformation of perspectives.

Cavell and Deleuze, orginators of a film-philosophy approach, have influenced and inspired a host of philosophical successors. Stephen Mulhall, one of the premier Wittgensteinian Cavellians, has developed his own bold version of the 'film as philosophy' thesis (2002, 2008, 2015). For Mulhall, films can philosophise and make 'real contributions' to contemporary philosophical debates, for example, on the relation of human identity to embodiment (for which the *Aliens* quartet, the subject of Mulhall's highly

influential book *On Film* (2002) is praised). To quote the most famous statement crystallising Mulhall's 'strong' claim:

> I do not look to these films as handy or popular illustrations of views and arguments properly developed by philosophers; I see them rather as themselves reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them in just the ways that philosophers do. Such films are not philosophy's raw material, nor a source for its ornamentation; they are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action – film as philosophizing.
>
> Mulhall 2002: 2

This claim has provoked a storm of debate and disputation, some philosophers applauding Mulhall's championing of an 'open border' between philosophy and art, notably literature, drama and film, and others denouncing this claim as a sophistical attempt to elevate artistically dubious popular entertainment to the lofty heights of professional philosophy (see Baggini 2003; Russell 2006). As we shall see, it is the claim that Paisley Livingston (2006) attacks directly in his deflationary critique of the very idea of film as philosophy. For the moment, however, I note that Mulhall, inspired by Cavell, is urging us to consider the merits of popular films and film genres as vehicles for philosophical reflection, engagement, even argumentation, broadly construed. Thus Mulhall analyses at length how the *Alien* quadrilogy – Ridley Scott's original *Alien* (1979), James Cameron's *Aliens* (1986), David Fincher's *Alien*[3] (1992) and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Alien Resurrection* (1997) – make philosophically noteworthy contributions to our understanding of human identity, embodiment, horror, sexuality, gender, technology, nature and mortality. They also engage in complex and sophisticated self-reflection on their status as cinematic fictions, the relationship between original and sequel, the question of artistic inheritance, and the significance of the 'star' in film narrative and audience reception (Mulhall 2002, 2008, 2015).

In the second edition of *On Film* (2008), Mulhall develops and extends this line of film-philosophical inquiry by offering a reading of Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002) as a meditation on the question of moral agency. The film, for Mulhall, is a complex science fiction/crime thriller response to the hypothetical challenge of a scientific/spiritual concept of predetermination versus our faith in human openness towards the future. At the same time, the film is a metafilmic reflection on the future of cinema as a 'memory of the future' (not to mention an intriguing commentary on Tom Cruise's ambivalent status as popular star, and the varieties of cinematic 'punishment'

to which his narcissistic screen persona is frequently subjected). Mulhall also analyses at length the three *Mission: Impossible* films (directed by Brian de Palma (1996), John Woo (2000) and J. J. Abrams (2006) respectively), exploring the complex shifts in identity undergone by Tom Cruise's character in relation to screen persona, visual physiognomy, bodily performance and the translation of televisual into cinematic worlds. Whether this trilogy of stylistically impressive, kinetically charged and generically sophisticated films bears the weight of Mulhall's brilliant critical ruminations is left for dedicated viewers of the *Mission: Impossible* franchise to decide.[1]

In any event, for Mulhall, the film and philosophy relationship can take at least three forms, all of which may be present in philosophically sophisticated films. 1) Films can reflect upon, question or contribute to our understanding of significant philosophical questions or problems ('films as philosophising'). 2) Films can question or explore the nature of the cinematic medium in a manner comparable to philosophy ('philosophy of film'). And 3) films can reflect upon their own conditions of possibility or their own status as cinematic fictions, for example as comprising a series of sequels within an inherited genre ('films in the condition of philosophy') (Mulhall 2002, 2008: 1–11). We should note that these are not hard and fast distinctions, and that films counting as 'philosophical' often engage in all three forms of philosophical reflection. Crucial to Mulhall's Cavellian-inspired film-philosophy is that such claims are not to be defended by general arguments concerning the 'film as philosophy' thesis, but rather by detailed analyses and critical interpretations of the films themselves. For Mulhall, as for Cavell, this is the only way to debate or defend the claims made for their philosophical significance (for example, whether they can reflect on the 'dialectic of originality and inheritance' inherent to the composition of cinematic sequels).

This point, as Mulhall complains, has been rather lost on his philosophical critics, who persist in identifying his film-philosophical approach as the application of a standalone methodology or independent theoretical argument. Such is the case, for example, with Paisley Livingston (2006), who avoids any detailed engagement with Mulhall's readings of the *Alien* quadrilogy, opting instead to challenge Mulhall's claims through general arguments or theoretical criticisms (as I address below). From Mulhall's perspective, however, the 'priority of the particular' (2008: 129 ff.) is what matters in aesthetics and in philosophy of film more specifically, assuming that we wish to do justice to the aesthetic complexities of film, and to entertain the possibility that films can philosophise. To do so, however, also demands that we remain open to the kind of self-questioning that philosophy

generally demands of other disciplines, and indeed should demand of itself. We do not always find such self-questioning, however, in critics of Muhall's approach to film-philosophy. To be sure, the more conventional 'philosophy of film' depends upon critical arguments and theoretical claims aiming at the highest level of generality. Cavellian or Mulhallian film-philosophy, on the other hand, prioritises the particular, responds aesthetically to the singularities of the work, and develops its argumentative claims on the basis of philosophically informed film analysis and interpretation (as I shall attempt in Part III of this book).

The Film as Philosophy Thesis: Bold, Moderate or Bogus?

An oft-recited criticism of some approaches to the film-philosophy relationship, reiterated by Mulhall (2002: 2; 2008: 4), is that they take films as 'mere illustrations' of philosophical ideas, and so cannot be counted as instances of film as philosophy in the proper sense. Thomas Wartenberg (2007: 32–54), however, has argued against the presumption that illustration cannot be a valid philosophical role for film to play. On the contrary, films can be philosophical in many ways. They can serve as critical illustrations of a complex philosophical thesis (Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) as an illustration of Marx's theory of alienation and exploitation within capitalist society) (Wartenberg 2007: 44–54). They can articulate complex philosophical thought experiments (the Wachowski Siblings' *The Matrix* (1999) as an experiment – for characters and viewers – in Cartesian radical scepticism) (Wartenberg 2007: 57–75). They can argue against a philosophical thesis by presenting a filmic counterexample (Gondry/Kaufman's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) as a counterexample to utilitarian moral philosophy) (Wartenberg 2007: 76–93). They can both illustrate a philosophical theory and present a cinematic thought experiment (Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) as an exploration of our moral intelligence and critical response to Aristotle's theory of friendship) (Wartenberg 2007: 94–116). And they can also perform varieties of self-reflection on the nature of the cinematic medium (structural avant-garde films like Warhol's *Empire* (1964) and Tony Conrad's *The Flicker* (1965) as foregrounding the background that ordinarily remains unremarked in our experience of film (Wartenberg 2007: 117–132). Wartenberg adopts a pragmatist, local rather than global approach, arguing

that we should demonstrate the link between film and philosophy via particular cases, showing the various ways in which they can be philosophically significant, the diverse ways in which philosophy can be screened. At the same time, he rejects Mulhall's 'extreme' version of the 'film as philosophy' thesis (that films philosophise in 'just the ways philosophers do'), and defends the more moderate claim that they can engage in various philosophical explorations of film – via suggestive illustration, thought experiment, counterexample, and self-reflection – in ways that enhance our understanding of both film and philosophy.

Not all philosophers of film, however, are convinced that film can be philosophical in the ways that Mulhall and Wartenberg claim. Paisley Livingston (2006), for example, has articulated a powerful critique of the idea of film as philosophy, targeting in particular the 'bold thesis', as he puts it, that 'films make creative contributions to philosophical knowledge, and this by means exclusive to the cinematic medium' (2006: 11). Livingston undertakes a critique of this bold thesis, as I discuss further below, for positing either an ineffable cinematic contribution that cannot be articulated discursively, or for having a philosophical content that is fundamentally dependent on pre-existing philosophical ideas. Livingston too, however, ends up advocating a modest version of the claim that films *can* contribute to philosophy; namely, either as helpful pedagogical illustrations, or as stimulating examples for the hard work of philosophical analysis (2006, 2008). We should note here Livingston's emphasis on 'philosophical knowledge', the *epistemic* aspect of the bold thesis, as well as his requirement that this contribution be *exclusive* to the cinematic medium (the 'exclusivity thesis') (2006: 11–12). The bold (epistemic) thesis includes, furthermore, two key constituents: 1) an account of *which exclusive capacities* of film are capable of making a special contribution to philosophy; and 2) an insistence on the *significance* and *independence* of this epistemic contribution, where this contribution does more than reflect general philosophical themes or ideas. Indeed, a bona fide case of film as philosophy, for Livingston, would be one that realises an historically innovative contribution to recognised philosophical debate on a given topic, and does so in an independent manner; that is, where the communication of the film's philosophical contribution 'would not be dependent on a subsequent paraphrase' (2006: 11) or interpretation.

The point here is that, in order to fulfil the bold thesis, a film cannot be just a skilful rehearsal or novel illustration of familiar philosophical themes. That a film might explore well-known philosophical ideas – to do with

morality, existence, love or metaphysics – would not suffice for the film to count as independently philosophical. It would have to make independent philosophical points or claims in a distinctively cinematic manner, and articulate such points or claims in a way that goes beyond 'mere illustration', pedagogical instruction, or theoretical platitude (as some critics argue is the case with the *Matrix* trilogy or with the *Alien* quadrilogy).[2]

Like Wartenberg, Livingston will defend a moderate version of the film as philosophy thesis, but insists on a much stronger degree of philosophical intention on the part of the filmmakers. He insists, furthermore, on the way that this independent contribution must use specifically cinematic means in order to achieve its philosophical aspirations. This constraint is underlined in order to rule out cases where a philosopher might be filmed delivering a philosophical lecture; such a film recording (as we might find on YouTube, for example) might well communicate philosophical content, but not by means exclusive to the cinematic medium (it could equally be delivered verbally, in audio recording or as a written text). Livingston summarises the bold thesis on film as philosophy thus: it refers to 'the idea that films do make historically innovative and independent contributions to philosophy by means exclusive to the cinematic medium or art form' (2006: 12).

Having outlined the 'bold thesis', however, Livingston argues that it falls foul of 'an insoluble problem of paraphrase' taking the form of a 'fatal dilemma' (2006: 12). Either the philosophical content of a film cannot be paraphrased, hence remains ineffable or incommunicable, which means that doubts can be raised about its existence or its intelligibility (since communicability and rationality are required for a thought or idea to count as philosophical). Or the film's philosophical significance can be so paraphrased, in which case it is not exclusive to film or has no necessary connection with film as an artistic medium (and might indeed be better expressed philosophically, which is to say, linguistically). Even if we moderate the requirement of exclusivity (that the philosophical contribution of film must be expressible in a manner exclusively bound up with the medium of film), this nonetheless leads to a *reductio* or trivialisation of the film as philosophy thesis. For in this case any filmic recording of a philosopher presenting a philosophical paper or engaging in a philosophical discussion – provocative Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalytic theorist Slavoj Žižek being interviewed for *Philosophy Now*, for example – would count as an instance of 'film as philosophy'.[3] Here, however, the philosophical content seems in no way dependent upon its delivery via the medium of film, since a sound recording or verbatim transcription would presumably convey the same content equally well.

If one were to reject this approach, however, and to argue instead that the 'properly cinematic' philosophical contribution of the film resists paraphrase (that it can be referred to, but not stated in words), then doubts arise, Livingston argues, as to the validity of the philosophical insights purportedly being expressed by the film. Appeals to a cinematic *je ne sais quoi* (Livingston 2006:13) that a philosophically inclined viewer claims to have experienced will remain doubtful if it cannot be further explicated with reference to reasons or arguments to justify the claims being made. Such esoteric philosophical insight thus remains either stubbornly subjective or untenably dogmatic; hence it cannot be adduced as plausible evidence supporting the 'bold epistemic thesis', namely that it 'has significantly advanced philosophical knowledge' (Livingston 2006: 13) in a manner exclusively dependent upon the medium of film.

One might nonetheless want to argue that such cinematic insights *can* be paraphrased, where a 'paraphrase' is 'the result of an attempt to provide an interpretative statement or thinking through of that item's meanings' (Livingston 2006: 13). In this case, however, we would be admitting that the relationship between film and philosophy is one in which film is dispensable; that is, we need not refer to the film itself but could simply rely on the paraphrase in order to reveal the film's philosophical content. Film, on this view, would depend upon language in order to communicate its philosophical insights; but philosophy has no need of film in order to do the same. The result is that philosophy maintains its position of epistemic superiority. Thus, for Livingston, philosophy can happily regard film as providing 'pedagogically useful illustrations or evocations of previously published philosophical reasonings' (2006: 13), but it cannot regard film as capable of philosophising in its own right. A film that attempted to explore, in an artistically sophisticated manner, philosophical ideas or the life and work of a particular philosopher – say, Derek Jarman's *Wittgenstein* (1993) – would still depend, Livingston avers, upon 'linguistically articulated background thoughts that are mobilised in both the creation and interpretation of the film's philosophical significance' (2006: 13).[4] In these cases, films remain parasitically dependent upon philosophy, whereas philosophy can exist and assert itself independently of film (or any other artform). The sceptical lesson to be drawn from this fatal problem of paraphrase, Livingston concludes, is that 'the cinematic display's contribution *to philosophy* can be neither independent nor historically innovative – as the bold thesis would have it' (2006: 14).

Does this mean that Plato was right to demand the banishment of the poets (or filmmakers) from the rationally governed city? Not quite. In his

study of the films of Ingmar Bergman, Livingston (2006) argues, rather, that we need only drop the bold thesis, that is, reject any exclusivity requirements concerning film's philosophical contribution and any strict epistemic constraints concerning its capacity to advance philosophical knowledge. The right alternative, Livingston contends, is a more moderate film as philosophy thesis, according to which we reject the haughty dismissal of film as 'merely illustrative', but also avoid the bold claims that films can philosophise in their own right. Instead, we should embrace the more modest view that film can be a welcome helpmeet to philosophy, providing lively examples conducive to pedagogical instruction, or stimulating source material for the conceptual work of analysis and argument. This rather deflationary conclusion is an example of what we might call the *philosophical disenfranchisement* of film: philosophy's inveterate tendency to subordinate art as an inferior way of knowing, one that philosophy proper would theoretically complete (see Sinnerbrink 2010, 2011a). In the difficult marriage between philosophy and film, philosophy 'wears the trousers' (to use J. L. Austin's rather sexist phrase), deciding the terms of engagement and judging the worthiness of its cinematic partner in the mirror of philosophy's own standards.[5]

In order to forestall charges of philosophical disenfranchisement, however, Livingston has conceded the possibility that films might make a modest philosophical contribution of their own in special cases. Adapting a 'moderate' (although actually quite strong) 'intentionalist' thesis on art (that the meaning of an artwork depends upon grasping the artist's demonstrable intentions), Livingston argues (2009a, 2009b) that films *can* be regarded as philosophising. We simply need to show – using verifiable textual or biographical evidence external to the film – that the author/director intended to explore philosophical ideas in an artistically serious way and put these ideas into practice in the making of a film.

His case study here is the cinema of Ingmar Bergman, long regarded as one of the most philosophical of modernist European directors. Indeed, Bergman has traditionally been interpreted as exploring existentialist themes in a distinctively cinematic style, and has often been aligned with the thought of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, not to mention the dramas of Ibsen and Strindberg. If there were ever an uncontroversial candidate for the title of 'cinematic philosopher' – to quote the title of the late Irving Singer's philosophical study (2007) – it is surely Ingmar Bergman.

Livingston's novel contribution to Bergman criticism, however, is to argue that there is little evidence to link Bergman's films or concerns as an artist with Kierkegaard, for example, or post-war French existentialism (Sartre

and Camus). Despite some minor biographical evidence of familiarity, Bergman apparently did not engage much with Kierkegaard's link to 'Danish Hegelianism', as Livingston remarks, and only ever staged one Camus play (*Caligula*) in his youth (and that as an anti-establishment provocation) (2009b: 560–561). Given the paucity of demonstrable biographical or external evidence in their favour, the standard 'existentialist' interpretations of Bergman, or even Christian-Lutheran ones, remain little more, Livingston claims, than speculative surmises or vague interpretative conjectures.

Be that as it may, there is a thinker who Bergman himself claims as a major influence: the little-known Finnish positivist and psychologist, Eino Kaila (Livingston 2009b: 562–567).[6] Since we have here, according to Livingston, a demonstrable case where an artist was influenced by a philosopher's work and intentionally sought to realise these ideas, we can confidently assert that this is a bona fide case of film as philosophy. We can find confirmation of this claim, according to Livingston, in the way that Bergman's films evince a sophisticated engagement with Kaila's ideas on the irrational sources of desire and action, and on the ineluctable conflict attending most human relationships. On Livingston's view, Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957) or *Scenes from a Marriage*, for that matter, are 'philosophical' only insofar as they are intentional efforts to express, or even go beyond, philosophical ideas that Bergman derived from his study of Kaila (2009b).

We can raise a number of objections concerning Livingston's critique. The first concerns the overly demanding intentionalist account of art at work in his argument. Artistic (and philosophical) meaning, for Livingston, is anchored exclusively within the author's explicit intentions; but this ignores the contextual and cultural-historical dimensions of the work's production, as well as the active role of audiences, viewers or critics in interpreting the work. The second is Livingston's dismissal of the possibility that intentionality can be displayed *within the work itself*; that we can impute an artistic, or for that matter philosophical, intention to a work in order to make sense of its cinematic, narrative or thematic structure or elements. We can do this (and often have no other choice if we are to interpret the work) regardless of whether we can demonstrate that the filmmaker (or screenwriter) *explicitly* intended to make a philosophical point or realise a philosophical idea. Thirdly, Livingston assumes, furthermore, that novelists, dramatists or filmmakers can only adopt, translate or apply philosophical ideas that are derived from their reading of an accepted philosopher's works. This assumption, however, begs the question whether film can be philosophical. For the question at issue is whether there are *independent* ways in which

films can 'screen philosophy'. Livingston, however, claims that the only way to do so is by construing film as *dependent* on a philosophical author's ideas, which the filmmaker then attempts to portray. This is to prejudge the ways in which it might be possible for film to be, or be regarded as, independently philosophical, and therefore blocks the 'debate' before it has even begun.

These objections raise a more general concern about how we should approach the film-philosophy relationship. We might ask on what grounds we should accept that the philosophical contribution of a film (or any other work of art) depends on locating a philosophical source that the filmmaker intended to realise in making the film. Why assume that films can be philosophical only if a critical interpretation can be anchored in an already recognised philosophical position? Would Bergman's films be any *less* philosophical if we acknowledged that Ibsen and Strindberg were equally important dramatic *and* philosophical sources for his films? In Livingston's view, Bergman is philosophical because of Kaila's influence *as a philosopher*, and because of Bergman's elaboration of Kaila's theoretical views. There are, of course, obvious cases of direct philosophical influence on a filmmaker's work: Eisenstein's Hegelian-Marxist dialectics, Godard's Brechtian-Marxism, Hitchcock's Catholic-Freudianism, the Wachowski Brothers' allusions to Jean Baudrillard in *The Matrix* (see Constable 2009), Malick's existentialism and so on. In Livingston's view, however, very few filmmakers would qualify as cinematic philosophers, since it is rare to find philosophical sources being explicitly cited or deliberately portrayed in movies.

On the other hand, it is not impossible. Some philosophers, for example, have maintained that the films of Terrence Malick – a former student of Stanley Cavell's, translator of Martin Heidegger and inheritor of American transcendentalist thought – can also be regarded as philosophical because of their realisation of phenomenological, existentialist and transcendentalist themes (see Clewis 2003; Critchley 2005; Davies 2009b; Furstenau and MacEvoy 2007; Loht 2013; Silverman 2003; Sinnerbrink 2006, 2019d). Showing that Bergman was impressed by Kaila's philosophy, or that Malick's films evoke Heideggerian themes, however, does not mean that these philosophical sources therefore determine the meaning – or philosophical contribution – of these filmmakers' superlative works. Rather, it is in the artist's creative appropriation and reworking of inherited cultural sources that we can find and acknowledge the work's aesthetic and philosophical achievements. The point is less about *the origin* of the philosophical influence than *the originality* of the film's treatment of these culturally inherited ideas. It is not in the critical detection of artistic intention but in the *aesthetic*

transformation of these intentions that we find the film's original and independent philosophical contribution.

Bergman's *Persona* (1966) can be interpreted as 'existentialist', I would suggest, not simply because Bergman read and was impressed by Kaila but because of the cinematic originality of Bergman's aesthetic treatment of existentialist themes. And this applies whether or not the filmmaker expresses any such philosophical intention (as many filmmakers refuse to do), or where such philosophical sources are absent, questionable or obscure (as is typically the case in the interpretation of artists' intentions). Livingston's attempt to anchor the philosophical contribution of the film in the intentions of its author is philosophical film criticism masquerading as theoretical argument. Ironically, this is one of the theoretical sins for which the much maligned 'Grand Theory' was so roundly castigated.

Marital Crisis: Saving the Film as Philosophy Thesis

There have been a number of ingenious responses to Livingston's critique of the idea of film as philosophy. Accepting the basic terms of Livingston's argument, Aaron Smuts has defended a modified version of the 'bold thesis' concerning film as philosophy (2009b). He argues that Livingston's 'insoluble problem' of paraphrase *can* be resolved, provided we accept a more generous conception of what counts as a philosophically significant contribution (namely that films can provide 'reasons to believe' a philosophical argument, and do so by specifically cinematic means, rather than Livingston's more theoretically onerous 'historically innovative contribution to philosophical knowledge'). Smuts agrees with Wartenberg (2007) that films can make significant contributions to our understanding of philosophical problems and arguments through their creative use and innovative staging of complex thought experiments. The latter enable us to test our intuitions, discover inconsistencies in our assumptions or convictions and can provide counterexamples to theoretical claims or arguments. According to Smuts, however, the 'film as thought experiment' position is still open to the objection that it is not the film so much as the *interpreter* who is doing the philosophising (for example, providing the relevant interpretation of *The Matrix* showing how the fictional scenario presented in the film might be used in a philosophical argument concerning scepticism).[7]

Defending a version of the bold thesis, Smuts argues that we can show how (some) films are capable of producing arguments, provided we accept a generous enough definition of them; Smuts suggests that an argument be taken as an articulated train of thought providing reasons in support of a conclusion (2009b: 413). Smuts' showcase counterexample of a film 'doing' philosophy is the 'God and Country' sequence in Sergei Eisenstein's *October* (1922), a sequence that presents, through Eisenstein's famous use of dialectical-intellectual montage, an analogical argument concerning the vacuity of religious idols across different cultures, and hence provides reasons supporting the sequence's intended atheist-materialist conclusion (2009b: 414–417).[8] Although Smuts provides a persuasive counterexample to Livingston's claim that films cannot 'do' philosophy, he accepts uncritically the terms of Livingston's account of the 'problem of paraphrase', in particular the claim that films are philosophical only if they can be paraphrased into suitably philosophical terms. Smuts shows that it does not follow from Livingston's argument that films cannot make a philosophical contribution by cinematic means; but he also does not consider whether the account of philosophical paraphrase on which Livingston's argument relies is plausible.[9]

Philosophical Paraphrase: Problem or Heresy?

Here I would like to question Livingston's account of the problem of paraphrase (an inversion of Cleanth Brooks' 'heresy of paraphrase'), as well as the conception of the film-philosophy relationship that his position assumes.[10] One of the problems with Livingston's argument lies in its assumption that the relationship between film and philosophy is essentially *epistemic*; namely, whether films can make medium-specific and linguistically independent contributions to 'philosophical knowledge' (2006: 15) concerning well-established issues (such as 'personal identity, freedom, meta-ethics, moral dilemmas, or epistemology') (2006: 13). As Wartenberg and Smuts remark, Livingston sets the standard for film making a philosophical contribution implausibly high (as though a film would count as philosophical only if its content were deemed publishable by a top international journal!). Why assume that a film's contribution to philosophy *only* concerns epistemic claims or furthering philosophical knowledge? Stephen Mulhall and other philosophers, for example, have suggested that the philosophical contribution

film can make is more akin to *showing* than saying: to exposing, reflecting or disclosing through vivid redescription salient aspects of a situation, problem or experience, typically through the artful use of narrative, performance or cinematic presentation (montage, performance, visual style or metafilmic reflection). Film contributes, moreover, to questioning or rendering problematic the background assumptions that we draw upon in framing specific arguments or making philosophical claims, whether on generally recognised themes, or on what we might understand film to be.

The issue of paraphrase, however, merits further reflection. Livingston defines 'paraphrase' as providing an interpretation of the film's (philosophical) meaning (2006: 13). A film can be philosophical, indeed contribute to philosophy, insofar as we can paraphrase its content into a suitably philosophical interpretation. If we admit this possibility, however, then we are in conflict with the 'exclusivity thesis': the view that the philosophical contribution at issue be communicated by exclusively cinematic means. Livingston's fall-back position, as we have seen, is to admit that *some* films can be said to philosophise, provided we can demonstrate the filmmaker's intention to realise a recognised philosophical idea (such as Bergman with Kaila).

Let us consider some relevant examples of philosophical paraphrase: Livingston claims that 'Bergman's films are replete with characterisations informed by the perspective on human irrationality and conflict that Kaila codified in his treatise on philosophical psychology' (2009b: 566–567). Andras Balint Kovács claims that Tarkovsky's films express the tradition of Russian Christian personalist philosophy (notably the work of Nikolai Berdyaev): the cinema, for Tarkovsky, was 'a particularly vivid and powerful tool to represent the struggle of the spiritual person to prevail in a world where everything from politics to science and consumer culture denies its existence' (Kovács 2009: 590). Or consider Lars von Trier's *The Five Obstructions* (2003): a maverick filmmaker/character called 'Lars von Trier' (played by von Trier) challenges his filmmaker-mentor 'Jørgen Leth' (played by Leth) to remake one of Leth's early experimental films (*The Perfect Human* 1967), under increasingly demanding rules or 'obstructions' imposed by the von Trier character, with 'von Trier' making the fifth and final 'Jørgen Leth' film himself. Mette Hjort paraphrases *The Five Obstructions* as thus providing 'a demonstration of the philosophical thesis that creativity finds a condition of possibility in constraint' (Hjort 2009: 637).

In each case, we have a philosophical paraphrase of a cinematic work, one that 'translates' its philosophical significance or contribution into a recognisable philosophical discourse or thesis. What Livingston calls

'paraphrase', then, is another way of saying philosophical *interpretation*; one that stakes a claim to capturing and translating the philosophical 'essence' of the film in question. How is the validity of such philosophical paraphrasing to be decided?

Here I would like to make a more general argument concerning the problem of paraphrase in cases where we are concerned with the idea of 'film as philosophy'. It is neither obvious nor uncontestable to claim that such paraphrases can readily capture a film's philosophical contribution. This is so whether we then take such paraphrases as violating the so-called 'exclusivity thesis' (as Livingston argues), or as confirming the film's philosophical contribution (as Smuts argues). For we are not dealing here with an argumentative claim so much as an *interpretative proposal*; a 'philosophical paraphrase' is not a theoretical claim about film's philosophical content but an interpretative claim or instance of philosophical film criticism. Such philosophical interpretations, however, are open to challenge and contestation; there are many ways in which a film might be paraphrased or interpreted, and it is not obvious by what criteria we decide between competing philosophical interpretations. This implies that the question of a film's philosophical contribution, indeed the very idea of film as philosophy, depends upon the philosophical interpretations of the films in question. We can only 'demonstrate' whether a film makes a philosophical contribution by offering aesthetically receptive, hermeneutically defensible and philosophically original interpretations of the films under consideration.[11] The 'film as philosophy' thesis is less a matter of theoretical argument (concerning, for example, the paradoxes of philosophical paraphrase) than of critical reflection and debate concerning competing interpretations of relevant films.

In sum, one key way to justify that a film has philosophised, or illustrated a philosophical idea, or exists in the condition of philosophy, is by way of a plausible but contestable philosophical interpretation of that film. The validation of the film as philosophy thesis thus depends upon our accepting that interpretation, or engaging in philosophical criticism concerning the merits of competing interpretations. To do this, moreover, we have to engage with aesthetic, hermeneutic and other relevant criteria that fall outside of the domain of philosophical argumentation, narrowly construed. In other words, we can only defend the 'film as philosophy' thesis by interdisciplinary means; that is, by offering contestable philosophical interpretations of films rather than relying solely on general arguments. This is essentially a restatement and defence of Mulhall's claims for the 'priority of the particular' in performing film-philosophy.

There is a further argument we could pursue here, which concerns the possibility of defending a modified but still 'bold' version of the film as philosophy thesis. Instead of forcing films to fit the stringent criteria adduced to define the 'bold' version of this thesis – that films make an independent and original contribution to philosophical knowledge by exclusively cinematic means, and which do not depend on a subsequent paraphrase – we could show how cinematic works can express and elicit *thought* by aesthetic means in ways that are philosophically and ethically transformative. This would mean modifying the claims concerning film as philosophy into a claim concerning the capacity of films to engage in what I am calling 'cinematic thinking': emphasising the affective, 'non-cognitive' dimensions of the aesthetic experience cinema can afford, an experience of aesthetic encounter prompting thought. As Davies (2019) notes, here it is important to emphasise *the philosophical dimension* of cinematic experience itself, the idea that such films can contribute to philosophical understanding *during* our experience of film, in order to capture how cinematic thinking pertains to features of cinema that are central to the medium (in particular, cinema's capacity to elicit affective responses). This means acknowledging the role of affective experience, the 'non-cognitive' dimensions of cinematic experience that can prompt thought or alter our ethical orientation, shifting horizons of meaning, reconfiguring shared intuitions and settled beliefs, in ways that can be subsequently elaborated in theoretical terms. At the same time, affective engagement with cinema can also prompt subsequent reflection, which would be required for any claims regarding the potential for cinema to enhance understanding, facilitate learning, reconfigure our intuitions or beliefs or shift horizons of meaning in ways conducive to ethical transformation. In this integrated or combined way, linking affective responses with cognitive reflection, both during and after our viewing of film, we might be able to address some of the claims made in favour of the 'bold' version of the film as philosophy thesis.

As remarked above, this approach does not confine cinema to the Procrustean bed of philosophical argumentation narrowly construed, but rather opens up the possibility of film and philosophy engaging in a mutually transformative encounter. This possibility of cinematic experience, in response to a film's aesthetic dimension, prompting thought, critical reflection and ethical reorientation via affective means, is one that I explore in Part III of this book, which is dedicated to examining cases of a 'cinematic thinking' expressed through audiovisual works with both philosophical and ethical intent.

Rodowick on a Film Philosophy of the Humanities

In recent years, D. N. Rodowick has made a major contribution to film-philosophy, both as a commentator and as a participant, from his groundbreaking independent philosophical study, *Deleuze's Time-Machine* (1997) to his recent major trilogy, *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007a), *Elegy for Theory* (2014) and *Philosophy's Artful Conversation* (2015). As discussed in the Introduction, one of these achievements has been to map the philosophical turn in film theory and rise of film philosophy as a response to the digitisation of the medium, the subsequent 'crisis' in film theory and the challenge offered by the rise of competing analytic-cognitivist approaches (2007b). In his two most recent volumes (2014, 2015), Rodowick articulates and develops a 'film philosophy of the humanities', drawing principally on Deleuze and Cavell, as a philosophical – or, more specifically, ethical – rejoinder to what he criticises as the overly epistemic and scientistic orientation of cognitivist theory and the dogmatically anti-theoretical stance of historicist and culturalist approaches to film studies. As part of this project, he offers a Wittgensteinian-inspired critique of the alleged post-Theory commitment to 'scientism' and correlated epistemic turn to analytic-cognitivist philosophies of film. His critique of the analytic-cognitivist paradigm, and defence of a (Deleuzo-Cavellian) film philosophy as an alternative paradigm of humanistic inquiry, represents an important intervention in contemporary debates and thus merits further critical reflection. In what follows, I outline the essential features of Rodowick's critique and defence of a 'film philosophy of the humanities', followed by Malcolm Turvey's (2007) critique of Rodowick and alternative proposal for a humanistic film philosophy, as this debate vividly articulates that character and stakes of the philosophical turn in contemporary film theory.

Rodowick's article 'An Elegy for Theory' (2007b) sets out, in compact form, his Wittgensteinian critique of what he characterises as the scientistic and empiricist bases underpinning the development of contemporary analytic-cognitivist film theory. He commences with an account of the Bordwell-Carroll attack on 'Grand Theory', arguing that, in their rejection of the implausible and incoherent aspects of such theories, they reject the idea of 'Theory', as used in film studies and other humanistic disciplines, *tout court*. Moreover, they are criticised for 'confusing "theory" with Theory' (2007b: 92), that is, confusing the concept of 'theory' as referring to a

humanistic practice of interpretation, evaluation, understanding and reflection, with 'Theory' as referring to the paradigm of Lacanio-Marxist-poststructuralist screen theory that dominated film studies from the 1970s through to the late 1990s (see Chapter 1). The latter has since developed in a plurality of directions broadly shaped by various sources in Continental philosophy (Deleuze, phenomenology, critical theory, feminist and gender theory and so on). In addition to this confusion, according to Rodowick, Bordwell, Carroll and other analytic-cognitivist theorists were guilty of ignoring ethical commitments shaping theoretical inquiry in favour of the pursuit of epistemic inquiry without regard for these ethical commitments. Indeed, contemporary cognitivists risk losing sight, Rodowick argues, of the dependence of epistemological inquiry on the ethical orientation shaping our commitments: as he puts it, 'judgments advanced – in history, criticism, or philosophy – in the absence of qualitative assessments of our epistemological commitments are ill-advised' (2007b: 92). What are these 'qualitative assessments' of theoretical judgments? Rodowick means here value orientations or ethical commitments that are supposed to inform, shape or even justify epistemic claims and inquiry more generally ('the ethical styles behind our styles of knowing' (2007b: 92)). A commitment to social justice regarding racial or sexual equality, for example, might shape one's research into the representation of racial or sexual identities in contemporary cinema. Rodowick's claim, as a result, is not to argue for a return to 1970s-style 'theory' but rather for 'a vigorous debate on what should constitute a philosophy of the humanities critically and reflexively attentive in equal measure to its epistemological and ethical commitments' (2007b: 92). The notion of 'theory', he argues, should be rehabilitated and restored to its rightful place – given the genealogical history of film studies and its adoption of the mode of (speculative and hermeneutic) theory – as the mode of inquiry most appropriate to the humanities. This is especially so, Rodowick maintains, in recent decades. With the advent of electronic digital media during the 1990s to 2000s, which rapidly supplanted traditional 'film' and related cinemagoing practices, film theory found itself bereft of an object, even ontologically 'ungrounded' in that it no longer had a stable object – namely, 'film' – as the determinate centre of theoretical inquiry. Consequently, and in keeping with the philosophical origins of film theory, Rodowick points out that 'we are compelled to revisit continually the question, What is cinema?' (2007b: 93). Coupled with this renewed focus on the question of ontology, film theorists also questioned the nature of their own discipline, ushering in a 'metacritical attitude' over the past few decades

towards its history and prospects within an uncertain intellectual and historical context – a troubled discipline with an unstable object and critical doubts about its past and present (Rodowick 2007b: 93).

It is worth noting that this account of the ontological unmooring and disciplinary self-questioning of film theory appears driven by technological as well as social-cultural changes in the medium – by the manner in which films are produced, circulated and viewed in a technologically mediated global context – rather than by any profound or global paradigm shift in ethical or political sensibilities. In any event, film theory, for Rodowick, responded to this ontological ungrounding and methodological self-questioning in distinct ways. The first is the rise of what I have called analytic-cognitivist theories that are inspired, according to Rodowick, by '[n]atural scientific models' (2007b: 93). The latter emphasise epistemological concerns and conceptual clarity, according to Rodowick, and assume that 'there is an ideal model from which all theories derive their epistemological value', namely the model of inquiry epitomised by the natural sciences (2007b: 94).

The second is the rise of historical and sociologically oriented theories, revising the history of film theory and that of the medium; these take an historical and/or sociological approach towards the development of film studies as a discipline, while remaining agnostic about epistemological, ethical or ontological questions. The third approach, within which Rodowick situates his earlier work, *The Crisis of Political Modernism* (1994), takes a discursive, genealogical or critical approach to the history of the discipline – in his case, inspired by the work of Foucault – analysing 'how knowledge is produced in delimited and variable historical contexts' (Rodowick 2007b: 94).

The question is where this 'metacritical' approach leads us, if we are committed to philosophising on cinema, given its emphasis on reflexively analysing the conditions of the emergence of various influential theories rather than engaging in any 'first order' theorising on its own account. Instead of addressing questions, say, concerning the ontology of cinema (like 'What is (digital) cinema?'), we would ask, 'What are the discursive conditions or ideological contexts within which such questions appear pertinent or necessary?' 'Which other questions are thus sidelined or marginalised as a result?' Although such an approach might tell us about the historical and institutional conditions shaping particular forms of theoretical inquiry, it leaves us in the dark concerning the nature of our theoretical object (we are none the wiser concerning the nature of digital cinema).

It is against this background that Rodowick launches his 'Wittgensteinian' critique of the Bordwell-Carroll model of 'post-Theory', which served as a

model for the development of what I have called the analytic-cognitivist paradigm. Rodowick targets the tradition of analytic philosophy, which he claims 'has been responsible for projecting an epistemological ideal of theory derived from natural scientific methods' (2007b: 97). He claims further that the concept of 'theory', as practiced within the humanities, has begun to disappear in favour of scientific inquiry, but also that philosophy begins to 'lose its autonomy and self-identity', becoming subservient to 'scientific ideals' (2007b: 98). Film theory, Rodowick continues, predicated on the hermeneutic and reflective practices of the humanistic disciplines, becomes delegitimated insofar as it depends upon 'concepts and methodologies influential in the humanities' that fall outside of 'naturalized philosophy' (2007b: 98) or what contemporary philosophers would describe as a philosophical naturalism. Rodowick concludes that the analytic-cognitivist challenge to film theory reflects a broader cultural critique, focusing on the privileged role of 'epistemology and epistemological critique' in the humanities as well as 'the place of philosophy in regard to science' (2007b: 98). Rodowick concludes his critique by claiming that the analytic-cognitivist turn is therefore nothing less than an attempted 'delegitimation' of humanistic forms of inquiry within film theory:

> Analytic philosophy wants to redeem 'theory' for film by placing it in the context of a philosophy of science. At the same time, this implies that the epistemologies that were characteristic of the humanities themselves for a number of decades are neither philosophically nor scientifically legitimate. And so the contestation of theory becomes a de facto epistemological dismissal of the humanities.
>
> Rodowick 2007b: 98

I shall return below to the question of whether such a critique is plausible or legitimate. How might we counter this alleged 'dismissal' of the humanities? Rodowick's gambit is to reclaim a certain philosophical approach to cinema, one oriented towards ethical and critical reflection rather than scientific naturalism and empirical inquiry. He argues for an epistemic and ethical reorientation towards less reductive, more humanistic (understood broadly as 'hermeneutic') forms of theory: a transformation of film theory via (a 'Continental' Wittgensteinian) philosophy into an ethical 'humanistic film philosophy' drawing on both Cavell and Deleuze. Although this will address questions of ontology and conceptual taxonomy (as both Cavell and Deleuze do in their philosophical work on cinema), it will above all emphasise their ethical thought (Cavell's emphasis on moral perfectionism in narrative film

and Deleuze's claim that cinema can give us 'reasons to believe in the world'). This is because film philosophy, Rodowick maintains, needs to balance epistemic concerns with ethical commitments, critically examining our value assumptions and moral-ethical implications of particular theoretical approaches or forms of inquiry, and thereby finding ways to think anew with cinema in an ethically and existentially affirming manner. Engaging philosophically with cinema, especially in the digital age, offers a way of reanimating a humanistic approach to art and questions of meaning that are not suited for reductive scientific analysis or naturalistic causal explanation. In short, Rodowick rejects analytic-cognitivist versions of the new philosophies of film, on ethical rather than epistemic grounds, and defends instead the cultivation of 'Continental' Deleuzo-Cavellian approaches committed to ethico-aesthetic as well as metaphysical-speculative reflections on cinema and its capacity for ethical transformation.

What are we to make of Rodowick's 'elegy for theory'? Has humanistic inquiry been quashed within film theory? Are Deleuze and Cavell (and perhaps Wittgenstein and his 'Continental' followers) the only philosophers to be trusted, at least in ethical terms, within the contemporary philosophical turn within film theory? Should we regard humanistic and naturalistic inquiry – or, for that matter, ethics and epistemology – as forever opposed within film theory and philosophies of film?

We can contest and question a number of claims in Rodowick's critique, and the implications he draws from them for contemporary philosophical film theory. First, it is not clear that Rodowick's characterisation of 'analytic philosophy' accurately reflects the diversity and plurality of approaches within contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. Indeed, it seems to refer more to the views held by logical positivists and logical empiricists in the 1930s and 1940s (Carnap and Hempel, for example) than to contemporary practitioners of analytic aesthetics or analytic-cognitivist theorists (even Bordwell and Carroll), most of whom would probably be best described as 'post-analytical'.[12] Apart from the explicit focus on conceptual analysis and the philosophical reflection on language and meaning (which Rodowick tends to ignore), contemporary analytic and post-analytic philosophy, by contrast, is characterised by a number of features. These include a critical rejection of dogmatic or reductive 'scientism', a greater acknowledgment of its own historicity and cultural-contextual conditioning and a diversity of approaches spanning both naturalistic and humanistic accounts of knowledge (see Rachjman and West 1985; Reynolds, Chase, Williams and Mares 2010). We might think, for example, of pragmatist approaches to language or

contemporary 4E cognitive theories of the embodied mind, along with 'hybrid' approaches to philosophical film theory that combine phenomenological and cognitivist approaches (see Sinnerbrink 2010, 2019c).

In his critical response to Rodowick, Turvey points out that his own Wittgensteinian critique of cognitivist theory (which Rodowick cites) targets *reductive* scientism, rather than naturalistic approaches *tout court* (2007: 113). Turvey's critique stresses, moreover, how Rodowick mischaracterises both analytic-cognitivist film theories and the nature of naturalistic theoretical inquiry within contemporary philosophy. Neither Bordwell nor Carroll are committed to a conception of theory 'based on scientific models' or 'grounded in natural scientific methods'; rather, both define film theory simply as 'explanatory generalisations about film' (Turvey 2007: 111). Carroll, for example, rejects the view (as does Turvey) that film theory should be 'turned into a science', favouring piecemeal forms of inquiry informed by empirical research but also constrained by critical reflection and argumentative clarity (that is, offering superior responses to shared problems or questions than competing theories). The vast majority of philosophers, even those committed to empirical forms of inquiry – which is not to be confused with empiricism – do not engage in experimental work but rather draw upon, analyse and critically reflect upon such work. We can say the same about contemporary philosophers of film who use empirical research in their theoretical practice (see Plantinga 2009a, 2018; Smith 2017; Stadler 2008; Taberham and Nannicelli 2014).

Turvey also criticises Rodowick's relativistic use of a Wittgensteinian critique of scientism, which has a decidedly Rortian-Foucaultian flavour (knowledge construed as cultural conversation and grounded in the acceptance of epistemic vocabularies by the relevant community of inquiry; and knowledge construed as a product of discourse, structured and organised by historically variable forms of institutionalised practices and social networks of power). The Turvey-Allen critique of reductive scientism within film theory explicitly rejects the (Rortian-Foucaultian) relativist claim that all film theorists need do is reflect on the history and norms of their own practices,[13] rather than draw or reflect upon scientific or empirical research, including work from other humanistic disciplines. The idea that philosophy is self-referential and makes no claims about, for example, both natural and social worlds is hard to fathom, since it suspends the question of empirical truth or historical veracity in favour of discursive consistency or social and epistemic familiarity. We are not going to understand the nature of digital cinema and its aesthetic as well as ethical possibilities by simply reflecting on the history of our critical theoretical practices and socially institutionalised

contexts of inquiry. We might claim that our theories have been confirmed by 'the critical investigation of our own practices', but they could still turn out to be wrong with regard to our object of inquiry or to the rest of the world – for example, in light of new psychological studies, sociological data, conceptual criticism, empirical research or historical evidence. Film theory/philosophy is not merely a discursive practice conditioned by internal institutional norms and epistemic practices but is constrained by both natural and social facts external to the relevant theories and pertaining to nature as well as to history, society and culture.

Turvey then criticises Rodowick's main claim, namely that a humanistic film-philosophy – exemplified by Cavell and Deleuze – needs to recognise both epistemic and ethical commitments in order to avoid reductive scientism or the failure to engage ethically with cinema. Epistemic and ethical commitments, he argues, do not necessarily determine the content and meaning of a theoretical claim or position; on the contrary, epistemic and ethical commitments typically *underdetermine* the content or meaning of particular theories and so can co-exist in diverse theoretical and ethical configurations (Turvey 2007: 114). As Turvey points out, one can be committed to realism about our knowledge of the world, yet one theorist might be a cognitivist, the other a psychoanalytical theorist; or one might be persuaded by Dziga Vertov's claims concerning the 'Kino-eye' without necessarily sharing Vertov's commitment to Marxism (Turvey 2007: 114). To pick some relevant examples, one can be a Bergsonian without being a Deleuzian, or a Wittgensteinian without being a Cavellian (or either a Deleuzian or a Cavellian without necessarily being a 'film-philosopher'). One could be a logical positivist while being committed to Marxist politics (as some members of the Vienna circle were), or a Heideggerian (who did embrace Nazism for a period) while being committed to neo-Marxist politics (like contemporary 'left Heideggerians'). Although critical reflection on both one's epistemic and ethical commitments is salutary, such reflection on its own does not have, as Rodowick implies, a determining impact on one's theoretical approach to intellectual inquiry.

As Turvey (2007), Carroll (1996, 2008) and Smith (2010, 2017) argue, there is no meaningful sense in which contemporary analytic-cognitivist film theory requires any reduction to 'philosophy of science', even if scientific forms of inquiry, and aspects of 'dialectical' theory construction, may play an important role in particular fields of research tackling specific problems (see Nannicelli and Taberham 2014). Nor is there any clear sense in which adopting a naturalistic approach in aesthetics, or in respect of film theory,

necessarily implies a 'dismissal of the humanities', unless one holds uncritically to C. P. Snow's famous 'two cultures' account of the conflict, or Kuhnian 'incommensurability' between scientific and humanistic modes of inquiry. Indeed, as Murray Smith has shown with his 'naturalised aesthetics' of film (2017), the 'two cultures' problem can be overcome through productive and open interdisciplinary inquiry, exploring how a non-reductive naturalism might contribute to, and work together with, more traditional humanistic philosophical approaches to cinema and to art more generally.

This is not to say, however, that there is no risk of subsuming or subordinating humanistic approaches to naturalised aesthetics, natural scientific models or empirical forms of inquiry. The risk of what I have called the 'philosophical disenfranchisement' of film persists, requiring critical reflection and a pluralist interdisciplinary approach instead (see Sinnerbrink 2019c).[14] This kind of methodological pluralism, however, seems preferable to Rodowick's rather rigid 'Wittgensteinian' (but actually neo-Kantian) dualism between the natural and humanistic 'sciences' (or *Geisteswissenschaften*). Despite the pretence of interdisciplinary openness, we find here a rival form of philosophical hegemony, where (Continental and/or post-analytic) philosophy arbitrates over which forms of inquiry are ethically legitimate with respect to the multifarious media of cinema. Instead of a methodological pluralism we have a philosophically grounded dualism, where each mode of inquiry (naturalistic versus humanistic), remains sequestered in its own epistemic and ethical domain, with little exchange or productive interaction between them. Instead of accepting Rodowick's straw man version of analytic philosophy (or analytic aesthetics), and his false dilemma concerning the rigid either/or choice between science and the humanities (the 'two cultures' problem), we should explore further how naturalistic and humanistic modes of inquiry could work together to deepen and enrich philosophical film theory.

The debate over the idea of film as philosophy thus raises the question of what counts as 'philosophy', especially in relation to cinema. It prompts us to consider the ways in which the encounter between film and philosophy might help us overturn the traditional Platonic prejudice against art, but also how to avoid forms of philosophical arbitration that dogmatically legitimate (or delegitimate) certain forms of inquiry over others. As I have shown, the new philosophies of film are productively diverse and engaged in complex theoretical disputation and debate. They have found original and productive ways of bringing film and philosophy together, even defending the view that

film can contribute to philosophy in a distinctive and meaningful way. For some philosophers of film, it is through an aesthetic cognitivist approach that takes films as capable of enhancing our understanding or facilitating knowledge, notably through the idea of narrative cinema as thought experiment or as reconfiguring our pre-existing intuitions or beliefs. For others, one can defend a 'bold' version of the film as philosophy thesis, arguing that some films, at least, can make original and independent contributions to philosophical understanding by cinematic means, even though such films usually involve subsequent theoretical reflection. There is also the possibility of defending the idea of films as expressing and eliciting forms of 'cinematic thinking': the capacity of some cinematic works to provide aesthetic forms of experience that communicate 'non-cognitive' forms of affective engagement conducive to further cognitive reflection.

There are, in short, many ways that cinema can open up many productive paths for thinking, provided we accept a broad enough conception of philosophy and remain sensitive to cinema's capacity to express and elicit thought. Critics of the film as philosophy idea, however, often miss this opportunity to deal with these productive disagreements, which are themselves testimony to the capacity of cinema to contribute to philosophy. Like Johan and Marianne, the estranged partners in Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*, the marriage between philosophy and film remains calm, orderly and secure, provided that one partner dominates the epistemic agenda or sets the terms of (interpretative) engagement for the other – hardly a recipe for marital bliss. Yet the film-philosophy encounter also points to another possibility: reinventing this relationship, overturning the hierarchy between philosophy and art, emancipating both partners through a genuine meeting of minds (and bodies). How this more felicitous encounter between film and philosophy might work is the subject of Part III of this book.[15]

9

What is Cinematic Ethics? Cuáron's *Roma* (2018) as Case Study

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Moral questioning of the ethical values and dangers posed by the cinema is as old as the medium itself. Hugo Münsterberg, for example, one of the founding figures of film theory, raises the issue in his 1917 essay, 'Peril to childhood at the movies' (2002 [1917]). Apart from his evident fascination with the new medium, he notes the 'danger' posed by 'the gaudy cinematograph', especially for children exposed to images of sex and violence, while defending its contribution to knowledge and to the learning of aesthetic and moral ideals (see Nysonnen 1998). Film theory traditionally has been wary of cinema's ethical potential, treating it as a fascinating yet deceptive medium requiring theoretical analysis, demystification and ethico-political critique. Concerns about the ideological power of the 'apparatus', its capacity to manipulate audiences through visual identification and narrative pleasure, fuelled the development of Anglophone screen studies from the 1970s to the 1990s (see Allen and Smith 1999; Baudry 2004a, 2004b; Bordwell and Carroll 1996; Comolli 1977 [1969]; Comolli and Narboni 1977 [1969]; Heath 1981;

Metz 1974, 1982; Mulvey 1975). Although philosophers of film have begun exploring the question of ethics and cinema, there is surprisingly little consensus on what this means. How do movies express ethical ideas? How can they reveal the complexities of a moral situation? What kind of ethical experience can cinema evoke? These questions have gained a renewed urgency with the shift to digital cinema and with the globalisation of cinema across diverse cultural and social contexts. I explore these questions in what follows, outlining some of the theoretical approaches evident in recent work dealing with this topic, and examining some of the methodological issues raised by the relationship between cinema and ethics. I turn then to a discussion of the idea of cinematic ethics, which acknowledges cinema's power to mesmerise and manipulate, but also offers a way of thinking about cinema's ethical potential as a medium of transformative ethical experience. To do so, and to show how film can serve as a medium of ethical experience, I turn to Alfonso Cuáron's award-winning domestic drama and memory film, *Roma* (2018), as a fascinating case study in cinematic ethics.

Cinema and/as Ethics

Although the philosophy of film or philosophical film theory has flourished in recent decades (see Elsaesser 2009: 185–187), there have been few explicit investigations of the relationship between ethics and cinema in the history of film theory. It is clear, however, that film has an ethical potential for exploring moral issues, ethically charged situations or moral 'thought experiments', and this has been taken up by film theorists and philosophers from a variety of philosophical perspectives (see Choi and Frey 2014; Elsaesser 2019; Flory 2008; Jones and Vice 2011; Mulhall 2008; Plantinga 2018; Shaw 2012; Terman 2009; Wartenberg 2007). More recently, theorists have elaborated the ways in which cinema can be read alongside philosophical approaches to ethics, or how certain filmmakers can be understood as engaging in ethics through film (Bolton 2019; Cooper 2006; Downing and Saxton 2010; Ince 2017; Sinnerbrink 2016a; Stadler 2008; Wheatley 2009). Indeed, philosophy of film/film-philosophy could be described as having undergone an 'ethical turn' over the last decade, reflecting upon cinema as a distinctive way of thinking through ethical concerns or even exploring the idea of cinema *as* ethics (see Chauduri 2014; Choi and Frey 2014; Downing and Saxton 2010; Grønstad 2016; Jones and Vice 2011; Sinnerbrink 2016a; Stadler 2008).

As a response to this trend, in what follows I analyse some of the ways in which cinema can be related to ethics, map conceptually the film-ethics relationship, and explain how particular films might both express and evoke moral reflection. This kind of inquiry into cinema and ethics, as I shall argue, opens up the possibility that we can understand cinema as a medium of ethical experience: a 'cinematic ethics' that brings film and philosophy together in order to cultivate an experiential approach to ethical understanding and philosophical reflection. It can not only stage moral thought experiments, thematise moral problems or pose ethical questions; it can also expose us to morally confronting, ethically estranging and emotionally challenging forms of experience that demand a philosophical response on our part. It is in this latter sense, I suggest, that we can approach certain kinds of cinema as engaging in ethical thinking, both expressing and soliciting varieties of ethical experience, hence prompting critical engagement on our part – the idea of cinema as ethics or *cinematic ethics* (Sinnerbrink 2016a: 10–17).

Cinema and Ethics: Mapping an Encounter

To explore this idea of cinematic ethics, let us map some of the ways in which cinema and ethics have been related. We can describe ethical approaches to cinema as tending to focus on one of three aspects of the relationship between film, spectator and context. The most familiar example is 1) ethics *in* cinema (focusing on narrative content including dramatic scenarios involving morally charged situations, conflicts, decisions or actions). Many analyses of particular films or individual auteurs will explore cinematic works in terms of their narrative content, moral thematics or interplay between cinematic, dramatic and moral-ethical concerns. The other influential approach, spanning both fiction and non-fiction film, concerns 2) the ethics (and politics) *of* cinematic representation. This encompasses, for example, ethical issues raised by elements of film production and/or audience reception, studies on the ethics of documentary representation concerning issues of consent or truthful depiction, or ongoing debates over the effects of screen violence in narrative film and computer gaming. This can be broadened out into the cultural-ideological domain, which takes tackles 3) the ethics of cinema *as a cultural medium* expressing moral beliefs, social

values or ideology (such as feminist film analysis of gender representations, Marxist analyses of ideology or critical theory analyses of 'race' and ethnicity in popular cinema). To this we could add recent interest in ecocritical approaches to the question of cinema and the environment, the depiction of animals, ecological themes and the question of the 'Anthropocene' in regard to cinema. Each of these three aspects of the film-spectator-context relationship has spawned a distinctive approach to the question of cinema and ethics (see Choi and Frey 2014; Downing and Saxton 2010; Ince 2017; Jones and Vice 2011; Pick and Narraway 2013; Rust, Monani and Cubitt 2015; Shaw 2012; Stadler 2008; Wheatley 2009). At the same time, few theorists have attempted to articulate the relationships between these aspects with a view toward their ethical significance, conceptual connections and theoretical implications.

A common approach in much recent philosophy of film is 1) to focus on ethics *within* cinematic representation (morally relevant themes, problems and scenarios within the narrative or approaching film as a moral 'thought experiment'). To cite an example, consider Wartenberg's (2008) discussions of *The Matrix* as a cinematic version of Descartes' experiment in radical scepticism, or his reading of Chaplin's *Modern Tim*es as staging but also extending Marx's critique of alienated labour. Or consider Cavell's 'moral perfectionist' reading of the melodrama *Stella Dallas* (Cavell 1996), according to which brassy Stella comes to a greater understanding of herself and makes an ethical decision to give her daughter Laurel a chance at marital and social happiness by deliberately withdrawing herself from her daughter's life.

Film theorists have often focused on 2) the ethics *of* cinematic representation, whether from the filmmaker perspective (production) or from the spectator perspective (reception). Consider, for example, debates over objectivity and truth in documentary representation, or whether a filmmaker can use elements of fiction in the presentation of what purports to be fact (for example, Errol Morris' use of fictional techniques, poetic imagery, evocative music and dramatic re-enactment in *The Thin Blue Line* (1988)). We might ponder the ethics of production, for example how a filmmaker treats his/her cast and crew (Werner Herzog's filming of the epic *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) in the jungles of Peru was notoriously risky and resulted in an accident in which indigenous workers were seriously injured). Alternatively, we might be drawn to debates over how spectators respond to images of sex and violence, for example depictions of rape in 'new French extremity' cinema or the use of non-simulated sex scenes in von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009) and *Nymphomaniac* (2014) (see Frey 2014; Horeck and

Kendall 2011), or the rise of what Lübecker (2015) has called the 'feel-bad' film or 'extreme cinema', which deliberately places spectators in positions of extreme discomfort (Brown 2013b; Lübecker 2015). The ethics of cinematic spectatorship remains a central concern in recent film theory, an approach that attracts much attention in research on the relationship between film and ethics (see Chadhuri 2014; Choi and Frey 2014; Stadler 2008; Wheatley 2009).

Film theory, moreover, has also been long concerned with the broader social, cultural and political implications of cinema. Since the 1970s it has emphasised 3) the ethics (and politics) of cinema as a medium symptomatic of broader ideological discourses (such as feminist analyses of gender and Marxist analyses of ideology). Among many possible examples, let us take Kathryn Bigelow's films on the war in Iraq, *The Hurt Locker* (2008), and the hunt for al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012). These films were both celebrated for their cinematic accomplishment as powerful and suspenseful action/war movies, but also criticised for offering ideologically slanted depictions of American soldiers fighting an 'irrational' enemy in Iraq and a controversial account of the 'War on Terror'. *Zero Dark Thirty*, for example, implies that the 'heightened interrogation techniques' deployed by the CIA ultimately led to the capture of Osama bin Laden. It thus offered a dubious utilitarian 'moral' justification (the 'ticking bomb' scenario) for the use of torture in prosecuting the so-called 'War on Terror' (see Westwell 2014). At the same time, Bigelow's focalising of the narrative through female CIA operative Maya [Jessica Chastain], who doggedly pursues bin Laden when her male peers have given up (reminiscent of Clarice Starling [Jodie Foster] in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991)), lends this film an interestingly feminist slant that complicates – generically and dramatically – the straightforward ideological critique of the film as an apologia for American militarism. Much recent work in film theory continues the cultural-political critique of cinema as a medium of ideological communication and manipulation, shaping emotional responses, beliefs and attitudes towards an array of social-cultural identities, moral issues, identity politics or cultural-political concerns (see Cunliffe 2019; Mulvey and Backman Rogers 2015; Smelik 2016).

What are the dominant philosophical ways of exploring cinema and ethics today? We can identify the following theoretical approaches, which also span the Continental philosophy/analytic-cognitivist film theory divide. Since the retreat from so-called 'Grand Theory' (during the late 1990s and 2000s), the *Deleuzian* perspective has become highly influential in film theory and film-philosophy (see Boljkovac 2013; Deamer 2016; Del Rio

2012; Flaxman 2000, 2011; Martin-Jones and Brown 2012; Pisters 2012; Rizzo 2012; Rodowick 1997, 2010, for representative texts). As discussed previously, Deleuzian cinematic ethics has been recently championed by Rodowick (2010, 2014, 2015), who takes Deleuze's cine-philosophy as a predominantly ethical mode of thinking (cinema as exploring what Deleuze calls immanent 'modes of existence', as communicating thought or giving us 'reasons to believe in this world' through new forms of movement- and time-image cinematic narration). From a philosophical perspective, there is also more attention being given to *Cavellian* film-philosophy (cinema as exploring scepticism, philosophy and the everyday, and moral perfectionism), which Cavell first introduced in the 1970s, during the highpoint of so-called psychoanalytic-semiotic film theory (see LaRocca 2020; Read and Goodenough 2005; Rugo 2016; Shaw 2019; Sinnerbrink 2014b; Wheatley 2019). Since the 2010s, *phenomenological and post-phenomenological film theory* (focusing on subjective and intersubjective experiences of affect, perception, emotion, embodiment and how these relate to moral-ethical experience in cinema[1]) has become prominent, with numerous studies focusing on the ethical dimensions of cinematic affect and embodied spectator engagement with cinematic worlds (see Barker 2009; Chamarette 2012; Ince 2017; Marks 2000, 2002; Phillips 2019; Shaviro 1993; Sobchack 1992, 2004; S. Walton 2016; Yacavone 2015). Finally, *cognitivist film theory* has emerged as an alternative paradigm to theorising cinematic experience, focusing on emotional engagement, moral imagination and the ethical evaluation of cinema (see Bordwell 1985, 1989a; Bordwell and Carroll 1996; Carroll 1990, 1998, 2003, 2008; Currie 1995; Plantinga 2009a, 2018; Plantinga and G. Smith 1999; Shimamura 2013; M. Smith 1995, 2017; Taberham and Nannicelli 2014; Tan 1995). As we saw, cognitivist film theories tend to adopt 'naturalistic' accounts of cognition in order to theorise our affective and emotional response to film, along with more reflective, higher-order cognition, which taken together provide an account of moral allegiance with character and broader ethical evaluation in response to narrative cinema.

All of these approaches offer valuable theoretical insights for understanding cinema and ethics. All sorts of 'crossovers', moreover, are possible between these approaches – for example, Cavellian-Deleuzian, Cavellian-Wittgensteinian, phenomenological-cognitivist, French feminist-film-philosophical, Deleuzian-phenomenological, Deleuzian-cognitivist approaches and so on (see Abbott 2016; Bolton 2011; Brown 2013a; Cooper 2019; Laine 2011; Marks 2000, 2002; Pisters 2012; Rushton 2011; Stadler 2008). At the same time, each approach foregrounds a different aspect of the film/screen/spectator/context relationship,

sometimes emphasising thematic concerns within the narrative, sometimes the spectator's response, sometimes a conceptual framework applied to the film, sometimes the significance of our affective or emotional engagement with it. What is less common is thinking through these distinctive but interrelated dimensions of ethics in cinema, which is what I shall explore via a brief discussion of the idea of cinema as a medium of ethical experience.

Cinema as Medium of Ethical Experience

What is the significance of the 'ethical turn' in recent film theory? One response is to point out that cinema has always been concerned with ethics, or that moral concerns have always been brought to the study of cinema. Early film theorists, for example, were concerned with the ethical potential of cinema, either as an aesthetically powerful way of cultivating moral sensibilities or as a pernicious, morally corrupting form of mass distraction (see Sinnerbrink 2013b). These ethical and moral concerns were displaced during the 1960s and 1970s by a turn towards more explicitly political and ideological agendas, a tendency manifested by the rise of Lacanian-Althusserian 'psycho-semiotic' and feminist film theory. With the historical collapse of communism and decline of Marxism as a theoretical paradigm during the 1990s, a renewed focus on ethics – on questions of human rights, democracy, concern for the Other and our responsibilities towards nature and the environment – became a distinctive feature of many forms of social, cultural and political discourse. Within the academy, the reigning paradigm of film theory came under attack during the 1980s and 1990s, being subjected, as Rodowick remarks, to 'a triple displacement – by history, science, and finally by philosophy' (2015: 6). At the same time, however, ethical questions concerning cinema became more prominent and continued to reverberate with the emergence of film-philosophy, most notably in the work of Cavell and Deleuze (see Elsaesser 2019; Rodowick 2015; Sinnerbrink 2011b).

Such a shift could also be discerned in contemporary cinema across the globe, which is rife with films dealing with ethical issues, moral problems or cultural-political concerns. Indeed, contemporary cinema is where many socially charged ethical problems and cultural-moral debates today are most creatively explored; it is where cultures across the globe can find imaginative

narrative ways to address, reflect upon, question and explore some of the most important moral-ethical and cultural-political issues of our times. This is evident in the rise of new ethically and politically engaged cinema, particularly within diverse cultural traditions and social contexts, amidst the dissemination of what is often loosely called 'world cinemas' (see Chadhuri 2014; Martin-Jones 2011, 2018; Nagib 2011).

The idea of cinema as a medium of ethical experience offers a way of understanding what cinema can do: its transformative potential to sharpen our moral perception, challenge our beliefs through experiential means and thus enhance our understanding of moral-social complexity. In some cases, it can also provoke philosophical thinking through morally confronting or provocative forms of ethical experience conveyed and evoked through film. In this way it can bring together the three important aspects of the cinema-ethics relationship: ethical content in narrative cinema; the ethics of cinematic representation (from filmmaker and spectator perspectives); and the ethics of cinema as symptomatic of broader cultural, social and ideological concerns. To these three dimensions we can add a fourth: the *aesthetic dimension* of cinema – in particular the role of aesthetic form in intensifying our experience, refining and focusing our attention, and thus of conveying complexity of meaning through manifold means – as a way of *evoking ethical experience* and thereby inviting further critical reflection. In sum, the question of ethics in cinema, or of cinema as ethical, is not exhausted by narrative explorations of ethics, or questions of production and consumption, or by the ethics of spectatorship, or by the ideological-political dimensions of cinema. Rather, it is important to understand how aesthetics and ethics are productively related: how the particular aesthetic elements and features of a film are articulated with each other, and how these together serve to communicate ethical meaning via aesthetic means.

The concept of cinema as a medium of ethical experience is one way of trying to articulate these elements – from the singular to the universal; from the embodied spectator to the cultural-historical world – so as to open up new ways of thinking and thus of realising cinema's ethical (and political) potential. This idea has three interrelated aspects: 1) the depiction of ethical experience undergone by characters within a film narrative, typically in the form of decisions, choices and actions within morally charged dramatic situations; 2) the reflexive presentation of ethical experience in the filmmaking process, that is, processes and techniques that distance the spectator from what they are viewing and challenge his or her assumptions or expectations (for example, the devices of reflexive documentary); 3) the intentional effort

to evoke the ethical responses of the spectator (ethical spectatorship) via a variety of cinematic devices and aesthetic strategies in film, including camera placement, *mise-en-scène*, lighting, sound and music, framing and shot length, montage combinations and rhythms, in order to prompt reflection on the ethical significance of what we have experienced cinematically. All three aspects of this relationship are related: the depiction of ethical experience within narrative film is aimed at eliciting an ethical response from the viewer, but also raises questions about the filmmaking process or about both filmmakers' and viewers' relationships with the image. All three aspects, it is important to note, are elicited or expressed by aesthetic means: ethical experience in the cinema does not generally involve an intellectual or abstract reflection on moral problems or ethical dilemmas but unfolds, rather, through a situated, emotionally engaged, aesthetically receptive response to images that work on us in a multimodal manner, engaging our senses, emotions and powers of reasoning. It involves cinema's power of stimulating sensation, affective response, emotional engagement and cognitive understanding, all of which work together to elicit ethical experience via aesthetic means.

Roma

Alfonso Cuarón's award-winning domestic drama and memory film *Roma* (2018) provides a fascinating case study in cinematic ethics. Set in 1970–1971 in the Colonia Roma neighbourhood of Mexico City, Roma focuses on a year in the life of indigenous Mixteca housekeeper/nanny Cleodegaria 'Cleo' Gutiérrez [played by Yalitza Aparicio, a non-professional actress]. Cleo serves an upper middle-class family comprising matriarch Sofía [Marian de Tavira], her absent husband Antonio [Fernando Grediaga], a doctor and their four children, Toño [Diego Cortina Autrey], Paco [Carlos Peralta], Pepe [Marco Graf] and Sofi [Daniela Demesa]. The family also lives with Sofia's mother Teresa [Verónica García] and another maid/cook, Cleo's friend Adela [Nancy García]. Taking an episodic narrative form, the film shows Cleo's daily routines, the cycle of repetitive domestic duties that span everything from cleaning, cooking, caring, washing and shopping, to child-minding. These routines are interspersed with important events from Cleo's own submerged personal life – her friendship with fellow maid Adela, and her relationship with troubled boyfriend Fermín [Jorge Antonio Guerrero] – a life that barely impinges on the family's awareness, however much they claim to care for her, as though she only existed to serve their needs. She falls

pregnant to Fermín, who discreetly dumps her in a cinema as soon as she reveals her condition, disappearing until she finds and confronts him after one of his martial arts training performances taking place in his impoverished village. His brutal, aggressive dismissal – threatening to beat her should she come by again with her child – foreshadows a later menacing encounter in which Cleo accidentally meets Fermín again during a violent student demonstration (based on the Corpus Christi massacre in June 10, 1971, in which 120 students were killed) and points a gun at her face. The shock of the violent encounter – Cleo and Grandmother Teresa are in a furniture store choosing a crib – triggers Cleo's waters to break followed by an excruciating attempt to get to the hospital in the catastrophic traffic caused by the protest and massacre. In one of the film's most devastating sequences, a harrowing long take spanning many minutes, we are taken through the entire process of Cleo's emergency birth, which ends tragically with her baby daughter being stillborn and swiftly taken away from her.

Cleo's numbness and shock barely register with the family, who then depart for a seaside holiday, ostensibly to have a break together but actually so that estranged husband Antonio can return to the family home and collect his remaining property. The second climactic sequence, Cleo's rescue of Paco and Sofi at the beach – bravely saving them from drowning, despite her stated inability to swim – parallels the tragic birth scene, and offers a powerful, but ambiguous, image of self-sacrificial devotion and powerful emotional bonds binding Cleo with the family. These same bonds, however, are soon loosened again, as we see the family's prompt reversion to their conventional role of privileged masters calling up Cleo to serve them as soon as they return home. The film concludes with the family arriving home after their holiday, excitedly telling Grandmother Teresa how Cleo saved Paco and Sofi from drowning, while asking Cleo to go and prepare smoothies for the children and fetch sweets for the family. Cleo retreats to the kitchen, telling Adela that she has much to tell her about what happened while they were away. In a conscious inversion of the opening shot, we see Cleo slowly disappear from view while ascending the stairs with dirty laundry to take to the rooftop washing area, as the camera holds on the steel staircase and open air, showing aeroplanes crossing the sky above the family home.

Shot in luminous and sharply defined black-and-white (on an ALEXA 65 digital camera, according to the credits (see also Marcantonio 2019: 40)), the film is marked by impressively composed long takes, detailed *mise-en-scène*, revealing tracking shots, naturalistic performances, complex crowd and urban scenes and historically accurate soundtrack usage of music,

contemporary media and found sound. As has been frequently noted, it has a strongly personal and autobiographical basis, based on Cuarón's own experiences and familial memories, and is dedicated to Cuarón's own childhood nanny, Libo (who provided many anecdotes and detailed stories serving as the basis for the depiction of Cleo's life and routines). At the same time, it indirectly reveals the social divisions and political turmoil marking this turbulent period of Mexico's recent history. As de la Mora notes (2019: 46–47), it takes place at the end of the 'economic miracle' period under President Luis Echeverría Álvarez, whose Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had been ruling Mexico for many years, and the rise of the student movement following 1968, with the subsequent authoritarian crackdown under President Echeverria, exemplified by the Corpus Christi massacre (which is depicted in the film).

The film focuses intently on Cleo's perspective, using long takes, slow pans and extended tracking shots to follow her movements, reveal her milieu and show her daily activities. This personal focus creates a powerful sense of domestic space encompassing the two-storey family home with its courtyard and garage entrance, populated by pets (a bird and the family dog, Borras), along with the extended household, including family members, the two maids, and other domestic workers. The film also renders the eponymous neighbourhood of Roma in rich visual and aural detail, creating a vivid sense of the social world in which Cleo's personal narrative is embedded. This is achieved visually through the use of long takes and tracking shots depicting crowds of individuals going about their daily business and aurally via an impressively detailed soundtrack composed of period-specific audio samples of radio and television programmes, popular period songs, down to the melodic whistling tunes used by local street vendors) (see Avila 2020). Particular attention is given to the musical scoring, which is diegetic in keeping with the film's realist style, but also serves as both social-historical background and commentary on the emotional expression of individual characters (for example, when Cleo sings along to Juan Gabriel's popular period song, 'No Tengo Dinero' ['I don't have any money'] as she washes laundry on the family home's rooftop) (Avila 2020: 250–251). This combination of neo-realist style (the use of black and white imagery, long takes, non-professional actors, loosely episodic narrative structure, diegetic sound and music, and local Mixteca dialect) coupled with melodramatic narrative content (familial and marital breakups, domestic drama, focus on female relationships, the tragic loss of a child), qualifies *Roma* as a moral melodrama with a realist style (see Sinnerbrink 2016a: 139–164). In this

manner, the film is able to show how, to quote a phrase, 'the personal is political', using a personal domestic drama, shot in realist style, as a way of obliquely or indirectly revealing the social divisions and ethico-political injustices shaping the experiences of an individual in this particular social world.

The opening credits sequence is remarkable, consisting of a single static long take of a tiled floor that is about to be washed clean with soapy water. The offscreen diegetic soundtrack richly fills out the image: the sound of footsteps descending a staircase, a metal bucket being filled with water, birdsong, a brush or mop being pushed across the tiles, dogs barking, the distant rumble of a jet plane, the sounds of cleaning and brushing as the morning domestic routine begins. As we hear these sounds and watch the criss-cross geometrical pattern of the floor tiles, water sweeps across the screen, like foamy waves, a skylight in the roof creating a reflection centre-screen where we can see the sky above. A jet airplane becomes visible in the watery reflection, rumbling slowly across the reflected frame, hinting at a freedom that remains remote, as the earthbound/housebound offscreen presence continues her cleaning. Wave after wave of foamy water sweeps across the frame, suggesting the waves and seaside that will feature in a climactic sequence later in the film. Her work continues, in silence and out of sight, from morning to evening. This is a domestic drama grounded in the daily tasks and routines that she performs 'invisibly', as someone who ordinarily remains out of sight, who does not typically feature in film, but whose story will reflect the social and historical world in which the family's daily life is embedded. Along with its Italian neo-realist resonances, the film's title, *Roma*, refers to a whole neighbourhood and specific historical moment, a complex social world, one that relies on those whose presence and labour remain invisible but which make possible the daily life and social dramas of those more typically featured on screen.[2]

After the credits, the camera tilts up, revealing that we have been observing the tiled floor of a covered driveway the film's protagonist, Cleo, has washed and cleaned. As the remaining water drains away, she walks back through a courtyard with her bucket and brush, the camera panning and following her as she greets the family dog and goes to the bathroom. The camera waits patiently, holding a static shot of the courtyard and side of the house, waiting for Cleo to return to her tasks and enter the house proper. Now we are shown the interior of the downstairs rooms, clearly an affluent family with a beautifully tended house, stacked with solid wooden bookshelves, the walls adorned with paintings, Asian statues and tasteful decor. The camera cuts to

Cleo continuing her tasks upstairs, now in the early afternoon, continuing the slow, cross-frame panning movement that will feature and continue throughout the film. It follows her routine closely, showing her performing her daily tasks, as she sings along to contemporary Mexican popular tunes, all of which gives us a rich sense of the domestic space and milieu she inhabits. The upstairs lounge room is messy, food and toys littering the floor, beds unmade, piles of unwashed laundry strewn about, all of which Cleo will have to do before the family returns. Another female voice calls out – her friend Adela, the other housekeeper/cook, who calls Cleo 'Manita' – reminding Cleo that it is 1pm, as she dashes out of the house, into the street, in order to pick up the youngest child, Pepe, from school. Background sounds enrich the sense of space – a street vendor, traffic, birdsong, dogs barking, chatter – as Cleo and Pepe return home. There is a phone call for Cleo from her boyfriend Fermín; it turns out that Adela and Cleo do not always speak Spanish but use the dialect Mixteca when together at home.[3] Overhearing Cleo talking on the phone, young Pepe is irritated, telling her 'not to speak like that', a pointed indication of the casual way in which the racialised subordination of housekeeper/nannies like Cleo and Adela is deeply ingrained within Mexican familial and social life.

The rest of the family arrive home and sit at the table for lunch, chatting about school and asking Cleo for snacks and strawberries. Cleo and Adela promptly tend to their needs, as we are introduced to the servant's area and kitchen at the back of the house. Sofia asks Cleo to dry clean her husband's suits as he will need them for a conference in Quebec. The family is relaxed and familiar with Cleo but it is clear that she is there to serve them and attend to their needs. We cut to the rooftop some time later in the afternoon. Cleo is now doing laundry in an outdoor basin while listening to a popular tune on the radio, 'No Tengo Dinero' ['I don't have any money'] with its plaintive and poignant lyrics: 'When I tell you that I'm poor/You won't ever smile again/I long to have it all/And lay it at your feet/But I was born poor/And you'll never love me'. As Cleo works, Paco and his younger brother Pepe bound up to the roof area, playing cops and robbers. Paco storms off in a huff after being defeated by his younger brother, who lies on a concrete block in the sun, playing dead. Cleo takes a break from her laundry to join him, head to head, lying on the block, playing dead as well. The symmetry of maid and boy lying in the sun head-to-head is striking, but the camera then pans upwards, revealing the broader background, as we hear the sound of the radio, dogs and a host of other neighbourhood maids talking while also doing their laundry as the camera pans across the neighbourhood rooftops.

Cleo's story is but one of many similar stories in this environment, representative not only of a singular family but a whole social world and complex way of life.

This scene is representative of both why the film has been highly praised and sharply criticised. *Roma* attracted both 'hyperbolic' praise and sharp criticism (de la Mora 2019: 46):[4] praise for its cinematic realist style, emotional power, moral-political dimensions and visual beauty, but also criticism for being a bespoke Netflix production with limited cinematic release, its 'romanticised' depiction of an indigenous domestic maid and its implicit sexual-racial politics. On the one hand, critics lauded *Roma* for its stunning cinematography, meticulous *mise-en-scène*, its realist style, offering both socio-historical verisimilitude and evocative expressive power, its emotional depth and its cinematic craft (see, for example, Bradshaw 2018; Darghis 2018; de la Mora 2019; Marcantonio 2019). On the other, some critics took it to task for a host of reasons: for aestheticising poverty and social exploitation, allegedly 'normalising' the racialised subordination of indigenous housekeeper/nannies like Cleo, for failing to offer any revolutionary political solution to an endemic social and racialised problem, peddling in a fake or inauthentic empathic politics, and even for 'denying Cleo a voice' (see, for example, Brody 2018; Tafoya 2018). The polarised critical response to the film, which otherwise enjoyed remarkable popularity and groundbreaking Academy Award success, is surprising and intriguing. As I discuss further below, the debates centre on the relationship between the aesthetic style of the film, the powerful forms of emotional engagement it fosters and the moral-political significance, implications and responses generated by it. I shall suggest that the film's aesthetic style and power of emotional engagement are central to its ethical (and political) significance. Indeed, the debate generated by the film – symptomatic of many aesthetic and cultural-political debates today in response to cinema – reflects assumptions about *aesthetic moralism* (the view that morally laudable traits of a work are also, or contribute to, the work's aesthetic virtues or value) and assumptions about the relationship between aesthetic value and ethico-political meaning (that they should always align in 'good' works of art or clash in the case of 'bad' ones).

A number of film scholars specialising in Latin American and Mexican cinema have responded to these criticisms and defended the film (de la Mora 2019; Marcantonio 2019; Palou 2018). Carla Marcantonio focuses on the socio-political discourses surrounding *Roma*, which the film itself has helped to spark. Referring to various public Q&A sessions she attended (serving as lead actress Yalitza Aparicio's interpreter), Marcantonio noted that much of

the discussion of the film focused on 'the relationship between the two women in the film, Cleo and Sofia (Tavira) – specifically, their parallel struggles in their relationships with men and the quiet solidarity that develops between them' (2019: 39). The film's clear social justice roots and orientation – its partnership with social activist platform Participant Media and the National Domestic Works Alliance (NDWA) – was overshadowed by the heated debate (certainly in the United States) over the role played by Netflix in producing and distributing the film (which thereby curtailed its availability to the public via general cinema release). Indeed, most of the critical discourse on the film has either praised it for foregrounding the story of an indigenous maid/nanny in a strongly sympathetic way within a realist 1970s Mexican setting, or else criticised it for romanticising, aestheticising or normalising her role as indigenous subordinate enabling a privileged bourgeois family to enjoy its way of life. These starkly opposed ways of interpreting and evaluating the film suggest that broader ethical, political and ideological issues are at play, not only within the film and in relation to its context, but also with regard to critical and theoretical assumptions shaping its reception.

The political context of this domestic familial drama, for example, and its overt political content, has tended to be ignored or swept aside in favour of other concerns. As de la Mora notes, the film is 'set in Mexico City during 1970–71, the tail end of both the so-called Mexican economic miracle (1940–60) and the beginning of the end of the political domination of the PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party that governed Mexico for seventy one years' (2019: 46). Although the narrative focus of the film is Cleo and her life as a domestic maid, as de le Mora remarks, '*Roma* keeps politics in its peripheral vision, showing how domestic and personal politics reverberate with the public and exterior' (2019: 46). The student protest depicted in the film, for example, is based on the Corpus Christi massacre of 1971, in which around 120 protestors were killed (including a 14-year-old boy). Cleo's traumatic encounter with Fermín, now part of the Los Halcones [The Hawks] paramilitary group that shoot dead one of the student protestors who had fled inside the furniture shop, underlines the intertwining of domestic and public politics, the way the personal sphere is shaped and, at times, violently disrupted by politics. This traumatic encounter also suggests why Fermín and Cleo cannot be together, not simply because he fails to take paternal responsibility for her pregnancy but because of the constraints of class and poverty (he grew up amidst crime, violence and drugs, still lives in a slum, finding purpose in martial arts). Indeed, these aspects are intertwined: his aggressive misogyny is coupled with an ardent desire to escape poverty

and oppression through disciplined self-transformation (martial arts). The latter, however, is also what also makes him an ideal candidate to be recruited into the violent paramilitary gang (Los Halcones), who provided 'muscle' for the brutal government crackdown on the student protest movement.

The failed relationship between Cleo and Fermín therefore needs to be understood in in this complicated context. There is Cleo's servitude and lack of options (although she is given medical care and not turned away by the family, she is still expected to continue serving them and remain dependent on them – baby or not – for her survival and employment); but there is also the ongoing impact of Fermín's poverty, anger and resentment, culminating in his opportunistic recruitment into a paramilitary gang. As Marcantonio observes, 'the scene in question is perhaps key to understanding how intrinsically the politics of motherhood are interwoven with the political 'backdrop' of the film and why the film is ultimately a more complex visual testament than a mere register of the director's memories could convey' (2019: 39). Far more than a nostalgic memory film, *Roma*'s historical and political context, along with its sexual politics, are essential to the film's narrative meaning, and are clearly signalled in sequences such as these. At the same time, the intensely personal yet detached focus on Cleo's life and daily routines emphasises *Roma*'s ethical orientation, which encourages both an immersive engagement with the details of Cleo's everyday social worlds and a sympathetic emotional engagement with her character in the midst of her personal struggles and unjust treatment.

Critics such as Richard Brody, however, claimed that *Roma* is flawed because it effaces Cleo's character and denies her 'a voice' (2018). He claims that the lack of dialogue attributed to Cleo, or voiceover/reflection perhaps, means that Cuáron's film therefore reduces her to a 'bland and blank trope', a cipher representing a middle-class stereotype of the strong, silent, Stoic 'domestic angel' (2018). As a result, so Brody claims, Cuáron as a filmmaker is unable to fathom, let alone convey, 'her inner life' (Brody 2018). Brody draws on interview material where Cuáron discusses his childhood, complaining that the film omits important contextual historical and political details (concerning abortion laws in Mexico at the time, details of the reasons behind the Corpus Christi massacre, details about the landowners' dispute alluded to by the film, the CIA's role in training the paramilitary groups and so on). As a result, he claims that the political dimension is 'strictly personal, de-ideologized, dehistoricized' (Brody 2018). Had the film taken a more didactic or documentary approach, giving Cleo direct speeches (or voiceovers) explicitly describing her 'inner life', or more obvious factual

detail for the (non-Mexican) viewer concerning the Mexican historical, legal and political milieu at the time, the film, presumably, would have been more aesthetically as well as morally and politically successful (in Brody's view).

As other defenders of the film have remarked, however, Brody appears to misunderstand the film's particular use of sound, image and genre, which are specifically deployed in order to create a rich and densely detailed social and historical world (Marcantonio 2019: 40 ff.). *Roma* uses long takes, slow pans and tracking shots, episodic narrative structure, period sound and music, and understated 'naturalistic' performances to present a detailed but detached portrait of Cleo as an indigenous maid whose life circumstances and social situation precisely prevent the kind of emancipatory political speeches, gestures or revolutionary transformation that Brody and other critics desire. In this respect Cuáron's film recalls Italian neo-realist cinema, which similarly offered realist depictions of a social and historical world, everyday situations inhabited by characters representing both individuals and social types – often played by non-professional actors – whose life, work and subjectivity is presented through action, gesture and situation rather than dialogue, dramatic resolution or heroic individualism. Antonio and Bruno in de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* are 'everyman' social type characters, rather than finely wrought, psychologically rounded, individualised characters more typically found in popular narrative film. Such films rarely follow the conventional narrative structure of a resolute individual triumphing over their unjust social world, opting rather for a realist presentation of their situation with its contradictory demands and unresolved dilemmas. As de la Mora (2019), Marcantonio (2019) and Palou (2018) all point out, Brody ignores or underplays the importance and significance of presenting the story of an indigenous housekeeper/nanny as its central narrative and moral focus. Cleo is an individual who also represents a social type, instantiating a social role in Mexican society, whose 'inner life' is made apparent through her behaviour in response to circumstances rather than via declamatory or dramatic speeches. Indeed, Brody's critique seems to confuse the film's detailed and focused presentation of how embedded the racialised subordination is in Mexican society with an uncritical endorsement or tacit 'naturalisation' or decontextualisation of such subordination. Focalising the film via Cleo's perspective, foregrounding her daily activities, personal life and struggles, along with her employers' casual, racially inflected subordination of her, is itself a subtle ethico-political stance inviting the viewer to evaluate, reflect upon and respond to the depicted narrative events and situations.

Brody's misguided criticisms of the film, however, do point to an important issue: assumptions concerning what a 'political' or 'ethically responsible' film should do or look like; and assumptions concerning the idea that aesthetic qualities, emotional engagement and moral evaluation should align in certain ways. The 'Brechtian' legacy concerning the 'political' effects of (emotional and psychological) distanciation, narrative interruption, explicit self-reflexivity, the undermining of visual or narrative pleasure, or explicit 'consciousness raising' (which today tends towards a recrudescence of didactic moral-political pedagogy), still marks much critical and theoretical discourse on popular narrative film as well as contemporary 'art cinema'. Ethical films, however, do not necessarily need to provide pedagogical instruction concerning social, historical and political circumstances. They do not have to give characters explicit dialogue in order to 'give them a voice' to convey a didactic message. And they do not necessarily have to depict edifying, affirmative or revolutionary role models where oppressed or marginalised individuals are shown heroically triumphing over economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, identity prejudice or social discrimination. Simply showing what the characters' experiences are, how they are situated within a world, how they respond to their situation, how they are treated, what social and cultural-ideological conditions they have to contend with and so on, can serve as an ethical stance or implicit form of political critique.

Films that align viewers with the perspective of marginalised characters, for example, and focalise the narrative in order to generate emotional engagement and moral sympathy, can not only give insights into their experiences, situation and world but also generate affirmative moral-political responses in response to narrative drama. One does not have to witness a social change or political revolution occurring within the film-world in order to adopt a moral response, change one's attitude or engage in action in response to a depicted wrong. In fact, showing the inability of a character to change their circumstances or transform themselves because of the constraints and limitations of their social world can itself serve as a form of implicit critique motivating the desire for social or political change. This indeed appears to have been the response to *Roma*, which in fact prompted activist movements to not only recognise the plight but to improve the situation and recognise the rights of indigenous housekeepers/maids in Mexico and the United States (see Marcantonio 2019).

Slavoj Žižek (2019) offers a more intriguing critique, acknowledging the cinematic power and aesthetic excellence of the film, but also noting the

manner in which the dominant strain of adulatory critical reception tended to miss what he took to be the film's implicit political dimension. The film is being celebrated, Žižek claims, 'for all the wrong reasons', focusing on the familial drama and reading it as a loving tribute to Cleo's selfless devotion and loyal servitude. This kind of reading would indeed lend some credence to Brody's critical dismissal, but it thereby also misses the implicit political background that frames the familial drama and pervades the social world the film so carefully depicts. As Žižek remarks, 'this focus on intimate family topic makes the oppressive presence of social struggles all the more palpable as the diffuse but omnipresent background'; the Real of History, Žižek claims (referring to Frederic Jameson), resists direct representation but can only be represented indirectly 'as an elusive background that leaves its mark on depicted events' (Žižek 2019).

There are obvious 'false notes' sounded throughout the film, for example, which support this claim: the manner in which the family will momentarily relax the 'formal' employer/master stance towards Cleo, watching television with her in a familiar way as she pauses during her duties, only to causally but abruptly remind her to prepare snacks and sweets for the children. Or accompanying Cleo to the hospital and efficiently tending to her medical needs after she falls pregnant, only then to expect her to continue her domestic duties as per usual soon after having tragically lost her baby. Even the fateful trip to Tuxpan to let Cleo 'recover' is a pretext to allow estranged husband Antonio to remove his things from the family home. At a more cinematic and aesthetic level, Žižek points to the formal features of the film which also signal the 'false notes' being sounded in respect of the superficially sympathetic depiction of Cleo's selflessness and loyalty to the family. There is an unsettling dissonance between form and content in key sequences of the film, such as the devastating labour and birth scene, which ends with Cleo's stillborn baby being taken away from her, and the near-drowning at the beach scene, where Cleo, despite being unable to swim, risks her life to rescue Paco and Sofi struggling in the surf. Both sequences, as I detail below, are shot in detached, almost unedited realist-style long takes, and eschew emotional dramatisation in favour of social documentation. These sequences, while visually powerful and emotionally devastating, are shots in ways that undercut sentimentalised or personalised forms of moral sympathy and suggest, at a deeper level, an implicit social or political critique.

Let us consider these two famous sequences more closely. Both are presented as continuous long takes, without melodramatic embellishment, musical accompaniment or intercutting to focus on Cleo's emotional responses

or those of the people around her. In the hospital sequence, the camera remains immobile, showing Cleo prone on a hospital bed as doctors and nurses work frenetically to deliver her premature baby. The infant makes no sound after its birth; the doctors realise that there is no heartbeat evident and try desperately to revive it. The emergency medical measures taken to revive the infant are shown, in real time, in a detached and objective manner. After much activity, which is focused but frantic, efficient but clinical, it becomes clear that there is nothing to be done, and the baby is declared dead. The combination of static camera, the extended long-take structure and the real-time procedures being executed efficiently but hurriedly upon Cleo's vulnerable, inert body, create a devastating sense of helplessness and loss, heightened by the calm, distanced, neo-realist style characterising the whole film. It is not Cleo's inner life that is at issue here, nor the emotional relationships between her and the family, but rather a traumatic, everyday medical experience that is at once deeply personal and impersonally institutional, viscerally physical and socially unremarkable – just another tragic case in the daily experience of the many Mexican women in Cleo's vulnerable social situation.

This unsettling combination of formal distance and emotive scenarios, coupled with potentially melodramatic, even traumatic content, is also evident in the famous beach sequence near the end of the film. The children have been pestering their mother to be allowed to play on the beach. They are on their way home from the town of Tuxpan, and pass by the beach where the children were desperate to swim the day before. Sofia reluctantly agrees and asks Cleo to look after them as they take to the water, even though Cleo makes it clear that she cannot swim. The sequence consists of an extended tracking shot that moves from the beach shoreline, into the water, and back again. The camera tracks the children as they run into the water and frolic in the shallows, tracks back as Cleo takes Pepe out of the water and back up to the shore, then tracks back again as she turns her attention, after a couple of minutes, to Paco and Sofi who are still in the water. The camera tracks slowly, in real time, as Cleo realises the children are in trouble, following her as she enters the water and battles the waves, remaining at a discreet distance from Cleo, always framing her in relation to her environment, so as to more carefully document what she does and the milieu in which she acts. In a gut-wrenchingly suspenseful sequence, the camera tracks Cleo in tandem as she battles the threatening waves and somehow manages to reach both children in distress and drag them back to shore.

This strongly neo-realist depiction of the rescue is encapsulated in the signature shot (used for the movie poster) of Cleo being embraced, but also

smothered, by the distressed and relieved family on the beach. As Cuáron remarked, the ambivalence of the emotional bonds between the family and Cleo as domestic servant – bonds that tie her to the family emotionally but that also subjugate her socially and economically – are subtle but pervasive: 'That embrace is as much a hug as a cage'.[5] After the emotionally draining rescue, there is a remarkable shot of Cleo, looking pensively out of the car window, with her arm around one of the sleeping children an enigmatic half-smile on her face. This apparently authentic expression of gratitude and emotional solidarity is then undercut by the almost immediate reversion to master/servant dynamic between the family and Cleo once they return home, even as they convey to the grandmother how Cleo bravely rescued the children from drowning. This inherent ambivalence between emotional bonds and economic coercion, family membership and social exploitation, socially habituated routines and the legacy of colonialist oppression, is inherent to Roma's cinematic ethics: its heightening of emotional engagement, stylised neo-realist depiction and subtle ethico-political critique.

This ethical reading of the film chimes with Marcantonio's critical point about the overwhelming focus on gender and female relationships in the film – both the parallels and contrasts between the experiences and social situations of Cleo and Sofia – which has also obscured the 'overt political content' and socio-historical context of the film that escaped many non-Mexican critics (2019: 39–40). It also resonates with de le Mora's claim that the film powerfully centres and visualises 'how Indigenous domestic and intimate labor has been racialized and gendered in Mexico' (2019: 47). Indeed, with its combination of emotional engagement, aesthetic stylisation, melodramatic content and historico-political framing, *Roma* focuses on the complexity and ambiguity of 'intimate labour' (Boris and Parreñas 2010): namely, all manner of domestic 'work assumed to be the unpaid responsibility of women, and consequently a nonmarket activity or an activity of low economic value that should be done by lower classes or racial outsiders' (Boris and Parreñas (2010: 20); quoted in de la Mora (2019: 47)). *Roma* is a film focusing on the dialectic of intimacy and distance that characterises intimate labour, a dialectic portrayed in films depicting the social situation and personal experiences of Latin American domestic servants (D. Shaw 2017). *Roma* shows in depth and detail the ambiguous attachments and complex social dynamics between Cleo and her employers/family members; they treat her as both a servant and as a family member, yet do not fully recognise her as a person nor respect her autonomy and rights (her situation is thus typical of indigenous maids/domestic servants and an expression of

the normalisation of racialised social subordination as a legacy of colonialist oppression).

Why has the film proven to be so popular, receiving widespread critical acclaim, yet also troubled certain critics as to its moral-political dimensions? Here I would like to consider the role of aesthetic stylisation and emotional engagement in generating responses to narrative film. Indeed, I would like to suggest that *Roma* pointedly raises the issue of how an ethical and politically oriented narrative film might use emotional engagement to develop moral sympathy but also explore the forms of moral-cognitive dissonance we might experience in confronting a clash between our emotional, moral and ideological-political responses. Most critics objected to the way in which the film's strongly emotional scenes and sympathetic portrayal of Cleo were coupled with a lack of explicit criticism or denunciation of her employer family or the Mexican social class system as exploitative and racist. As remarked, these criticisms generally tend to downplay or ignore the historical context and political content of the film, but nonetheless point to a pervasive assumption: that emotional engagement is always tied to moral allegiance in straightforward ways, and that emotional sympathy cannot co-exist with critical reflection or moral-ethical critique. One of the striking features of the film, however, is its capacity to present and elicit emotional ambiguity and moral ambivalence. It shows the ambiguous emotional bonds between Cleo and the family, sympathetically portraying her care and devotion, while also presenting the complex social-historical context and implicit political significance of her situation, without explicitly 'denouncing' either her family or Cleo herself. Are we supposed to 'approve' of her family or 'condemn' them? Are we supposed to sympathise with her plight while admiring her moral character or criticise her conformity and 'failure' to revolt? The lack of a clear resolution – the film's ambiguous concluding lines, Cleo's remark to her friend, 'I have so much to tell you' – could suggest either a continuation of the status quo or a significant change in Cleo's situation and future. That *Roma* refrains from a simplistic moralising portrayal of her family as exploiters and of Cleo as either long-suffering victim or as proto-revolutionary is taken as a criticism of the film rather than as a sign of its moral-ethical complexity – its invitation to engage in critical reflection on what we have experienced in watching this remarkable film.

It is *Roma*'s emphasis on rich descriptive presentation of Cleo's daily experience of domestic servitude, including the complex emotional bonds with her employer/family coupled with their causal exploitation of her, which allows the film to create a space for ethical experience and critical reflection. It is not

by way of didactic denunciation of her employers' racism or of Cleo's subjugation and dehumanisation, but the emotionally compelling depiction of the daily reality of social/class division and broader political turmoil that generates emotional engagement and moral sympathy coupled with a 'distanced' aesthetic presentation encouraging thoughtful reflection. *Roma* thus recalls and repeats the traditions of Italian neo-realism – think of the depiction of the melancholy young maid Maria [Maria-Pia Casilio], who, much like Cleo, also finds herself pregnant, in de Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952). *Roma* shows rather than explains the plight of underprivileged or marginalised characters, the complexity of their social relationships and the seemingly intractable social and class divisions shaping their world. It is curious how little attention, however, has been given to *Roma*'s obvious homages to neo-realist cinema (to Rossellini, de Sica, Savattini and early Fellini), which are artfully blended with tropes belonging to Mexican soap opera or telenovelas. Recalling the tradition of neorealism, *Roma*'s subtle ethical achievement is to invite emotional engagement with the quiet but expressive protagonist. The film's patient and intimate yet distant and detached depiction of her domestic routines within a richly rendered social world also serves a moral evaluation of her dignity, and an implicit critique of the family's – and Mexican society's – failure to recognise her autonomy and humanity. From this point of view, the 'naturalisation' of class privilege and colonialist forms of racially marked oppression in the film are difficult to miss. Moreover, the fact that *Roma* remains entirely focused on Cleo's experiences as an indigenous maid – one of a multitude of similar stories making up this world – is itself an important ethico-political gesture made in emotionally compelling and cinematically distinctive terms.

Despite misguided charges that *Roma* represents nothing more than an aestheticised apologia for colonialist racism, the film has been remarkably successful in promoting the kind of political responses that such critics have called for. It has raised awareness of the exploitative conditions faced by domestic maids/servants, the racist and colonialist history and underpinnings of the practice and the urgent need for reform and political change in contemporary Mexico (Marcantonio 2019). Because such social and political 'solutions' are missing in the film, *Roma*'s realistically documented, aesthetically immersive and morally sympathetic depiction of Cleo's domestic situation – presented in a neo-realist/familial melodramatic mode memorialising her story as representative of other indigenous women – invites us ethically to reflect upon, shift our attitudes, even take action in response to her story. That is why *Roma* is a remarkable case of cinematic ethics in action.

Part III

Cinematic Thinking

10 Photobiographies: The 'Derrida' Documentaries as Film-Philosophy

11 Planet *Melancholia*: Romanticism, Mood and Cinematic Ethics

12 Television as Philosophy: Reflections on *Black Mirror*

Having examined the analytic-cognitivist turn (Part I), and new approaches defining contemporary philosophies of film (Part II), including an exploration of cinematic ethics, Part III of this book attempts to put into practice the film-philosophy/cinematic ethics approach explored in the preceding two chapters. Film-philosophy emphasises the importance of our aesthetic experience of particular films, defending whatever theoretical claims one might make with reference to the film-philosophical readings that one offers. I take as my guide here Mulhall's idea of 'the priority of the particular' (2008: 129 ff.). As discussed in Chapter 8, the claims made in film-philosophy cannot be decided purely on theoretical grounds but require, as Cavell also claims, recourse to philosophical film criticism (1981: 1–42; 1996: 3–45); that is, the testing of one's aesthetic experience with particular films via philosophical interpretation and critical reflection. I also draw on Deleuze's claim that cinema can enact a 'shock to thought' (1989: 189–224): that it performs a cinematic thinking in images that both challenges and

resists philosophy, provoking us to think in response to what film enables us to experience, without, however, reducing cinema to a mere reflection of an assumed philosophical thesis or theoretical framework. Taken together, these ideas present the most promising guides to performing what I am calling (romantic) film-philosophy.

Although Cavell and Mulhall (see also Peretz 2008) have focused on popular genres and films for their philosophical readings, I have chosen a variety of cinematic case studies: two contrasting philosophical documentaries about the life and thought of a philosopher (*Derrida* and *D'ailleur, Derrida*), an art cinema/crossover (or generically hybrid) film (Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011)) and an innovative dystopian television series, Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* (2011–2019). One can imagine a straightforward criticism of this approach. By choosing philosophical documentaries or 'art films', even 'quality television', a critic might object, you are skewing the film-philosophy relationship in favour of philosophy by avoiding, in typically elitist fashion, dealing with popular genres and films. Such elitism, our critic might continue, simply reproduces the kind of philosophical disenfranchisement of film that you claim is overturned by the film-philosophy approach. Even if you were able to show that some films can 'do' philosophy, our critic might continue, say art films that may or may not have such philosophical pretensions, this would not show that 'cinema in general' can be philosophical, which is presumably what philosophical readings of popular genres and films (or even television) intend to show.[1]

Mulhall (2008), for example, defends his choice of films belonging to popular genres along precisely these lines. If one can show that films such as *Mission: Impossible* can be taken seriously as philosophy, then the same can be said, *a fortiori*, for films and *auteurs* belonging to the 'philosophical canon' (say Bergman, Godard, Tarkovsky, Antonioni, Malick, *Rashomon*, *Blade Runner*, *The Thin Red Line*, *Memento*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and so on). While I take Mulhall's point, there is no reason to therefore avoid responding to such films, especially when they are among the most challenging and rewarding instances of 'philosophical' cinema. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that the 'film as philosophy' thesis must be made a fully generalisable claim. Indeed, there may well be only select instances of filmmaking that elicit suitably 'philosophical' forms of criticism or that count as cases of cinematic thinking. Like aesthetic value, philosophical value may be an evaluative, rather than objective, property of individual works, which is to say more a matter of experiencing, interpreting and analysing a work in certain ways rather than detecting and defining some pre-existing property within it.

In any event, I would admit that there is a degree of "elitism" (which I take to be more a moralising accusation than a philosophical objection) in choosing certain films rather than others (exercising one's aesthetic or philosophical tastes cannot help but be so). This is an "elitism", however, that is plural and open-ended, an elitism of aesthetic, artistic and philosophical achievement, rather than one of pernicious ideological exclusion. Excellence in cinematic art can be achieved in many ways, in many styles and in many genres (in popular romance as much as experimental film, in horror as much as documentary, in self-reflective art film as much as action or science fiction genres, in cinema as in television). Moreover, as Cavell remarks (1979: 219), films that take the condition of film as their subject enjoy an inherent philosophical advantage or greater degree of self-understanding than other less self-aware or self-questioning works. It is only fitting that films inviting the viewer to think, to feel and to question should have their invitations accepted.

As far as the choice of a television series like *Black Mirror* is concerned, one could imagine sceptics of the 'film as philosophy' idea being even less convinced by the choice of a television series, especially one that adopts an anthology series format rather than the much vaunted long-form, continuous television serial. The latter have come to represent the standard of artistic excellence in narrative television, with examples such as *The Wire* (2002–2008), *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) and *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013) being the subject of numerous studies (see, for example, Crosby, Vannatta and Bdzak 2013; Decker, Koepsell and Arp 2017; Greene and Vernezze 2004; Williams 2014). These focus not only on their artistic achievement but the manner in which the long-form, multiplot narrative enables complex varieties of emotional engagement, dynamic and varying character arcs, exploration of moral ambiguity and the descriptive disclosure of cinematic worlds and social-historical milieu in ways not available to most narrative films. Although I accept the importance of the long-form television serial, I would like to defend the philosophical significance of the short-form episodic television series. It is precisely through its more compact 'thought experiment' format – exploring hypothetical possibilities in circumscribed scenarios, where character-driven narrative is eschewed in favour of compact narrative situations that extrapolate from our present social reality – that *Black Mirror* is better able to imagine alternative presents and explore 'near future' possibilities in response to contemporary technological, social and ethical challenges. This remarkable case of 'television as philosophy' is the subject of my final chapter, which allows me to revisit the discussion of cinema as

moral-philosophical 'thought experiment'. It also enables me to suggest ways in which *Black Mirror* episodes might not only offer philosophically challenging televisual thought experiments but also, through acknowledging and reflecting on their own status and conditions of possibility, offer striking examples of (modernist?) television existing 'in the condition of philosophy' (Mulhall 2002: 6; 2008: 7).

I would add that there is also an *ethical* decision at stake in devoting time and thought to films or television shows that deliberately take the path less chosen, that question established conventions and that experiment with evoking new ways of thinking and feeling. In a global cultural and economic marketplace dominated by certain types of stories or ideological points of view, there is ethical purpose in devoting attention to the more marginal, more questioning, more aesthetically and intellectually demanding films that one encounters.[2] This is one reason why I chose to discuss two independent, lesser known philosophical-biographical documentaries, Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman's *Derrida*, and Egyptian poet and filmmaker Safaa Fathy's *D'ailleur, Derrida*. Although documentary film has become globally popular in recent years, documentaries focusing on philosophers remain a lesser-known but innovative and important subgenre that offer ideal cases for exploring the film-philosophy relationship.

Why choose these particular case studies for more extended reflection? There are three main reasons. 1) These are films/works in which the filmmakers explore non-mainstream narrative, while engaging, more or less critically, with the Hollywood tradition, or which push established forms (in documentary or television) in new directions. 2) They are generic hybrids (blending genres in novel, aesthetically challenging ways), which also explore a variety of issues or themes of philosophical interest, including their own status as cinematic/audiovisual works. 3) They address philosophical questions or ethical problems in original and creative ways, offering what I call (in regard to the 'Derrida' documentaries) instances of 'performative philosophy' on film. In doing so, they also display a striking 'resistance to theory', which makes them challenging test cases to explore the hypothesis of *cinematic thinking*: a non-conceptual or affective thinking in images that resists cognitive closure or theoretical subsumption. Moreover, there is an urgency in dealing with the more pressing issues facing us within our technologically mediated world – such as the ecological and environmental crises, the social and cultural implications of new technologies – that makes film and television dealing with these issues both philosophically and ethically significant. The social and technological challenges demand imaginative and ethical responses, works of

art responding to the relentless acceleration of technological transformation and its impact on culture and subjectivity, sociality and politics, cinema and ethics. This is what makes *Black Mirror*, which appropriates cinematic narrative into a televisual anthology format, offering performative critical engagements with contemporary digital media culture and technology, such an appropriate choice for my final case study. Generically hybrid works such as these – spanning biographical documentary, art film, art horror, disaster film, science fiction and speculative fiction genres – allow us to explore contemporary instances of cinematic thinking by way of detailed film-philosophical and ethical criticism as responses to the powerful aesthetic experiences they afford.

10

Photobiographies: The 'Derrida' Documentaries as Film-Philosophy

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Although the question of film and philosophy has attracted much attention, most discussion concerning the 'film as philosophy' debate has focused on narrative film with only occasional references to documentary (see, for example, Constable 2009; Livingston 2009; Mulhall 2008; Read and Goodenough 2005; Sinnerbrink 2016a; Wartenberg 2007).[1] Even less attention has been given to a small but growing number of non-fictional films that focus specifically on philosophers and their work, films that deploy creative cinematic means for the exploration of philosophical ideas.[2]

Consider Derek Jarman's *Wittgenstein* (1993), which takes a creative dramatisation approach to selected vignettes from Wittgenstein's life – focusing as much on his repressed sexuality as on his thought and social milieu – or Sophie Fiennes' two films on Slavoj Žižek, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006) and *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), which both feature Žižek discoursing on the construction of desire through cinema or the role of ideology in structuring social reality while 'acting' as himself within cleverly staged parodic scenes from famous but relevant movies (*Psycho*, *The Matrix*, *The Birds*, *They Live* and *Titanic*). In a more conventional biographical documentary vein, Gorav and Rohan Kalvan's *Badiou* (2018) focuses on the life and personality of French philosopher Alain Badiou, giving him ample screen time, through interviews and lectures, to articulate his thought and politics, discuss his childhood, and to present an accessible and unadorned portrait of the ageing thinker's personality and views. Margarethe von Trotta's *Hannah Arendt* (2012) is a more 'classic' biopic, featuring key episodes in the life of Arendt, especially the controversy surrounding the publication of her work *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), based on her articles covering Eichmann's trial for war crimes and analysis of the 'banality of evil' that he represented. The film concludes with a powerful lecture given to her students at the New School which both communicates and enacts Arendt's conception of politics as the public presentation of speech and action oriented towards an acknowledgment of history and courage to create the new.

Another such biographical documentary, but more philosophically daring, is Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman's *Derrida* (2002), a film focusing on the late Jacques Derrida's life and work, which drew ambivalent responses from viewers and critics. Some acknowledged the film's attempts to explore the boundary between the biographical and the philosophical, and to evoke the thought of deconstruction via its reflexive staging of the various interviews, lectures, readings and reality TV vignettes composing the film. David Roden (2003), however, echoes many critics in lamenting the film *Derrida*'s failure to engage in 'philosophical discussion and analysis', hence criticises it for being 'insufficiently philosophical'. By contrast, a related philosophical documentary, Egyptian poet, playwright and filmmaker Safaa Fathy's *D'ailleur, Derrida* [*Derrida's Elsewhere*] (1999), has been praised for precisely the opposite reasons, namely for succeeding in both revealing its subject on screen, the philosopher Jacques Derrida, focusing attention on his Algerian background, his life in Paris, personal background, complex identity (Derrida regarding himself, like Spinoza, as a Marrano Jew), while at

the same time finding cinematic ways of presenting essential elements of Derrida's deconstructive mode of thinking.

David Wills, for example, comments on the film's success in presenting the idea of an 'elsewhere' that is related to Derrida's notion of writing [*écriture*] as the displacement of speech (by juxtaposing shots of the different contexts in which Derrida is filmed, such as his childhood home in Algeria, the *École normale supérieure* where he taught for 30 years, his private library, garden and home, with images of Derrida speaking to camera, articulating his thought in filmed verbal presentations, and featuring various 'displacements' of Derrida to locations 'elsewhere', such as Spain, desert landscapes, seasides and the like, rich with historical, literary and cultural associations yet also resonant with his philosophical thought). He also praises the film's success in conveying cinematically the ethical ideas of confession/writing/autobiography, witnessing, hospitality and forgiveness: by removing the filmmaker from the filmmaking process, *D'ailleur, Derrida* creates a space for Derrida to speak and philosophise freely, 'scripting' the film himself, so to speak, thereby opening up an 'elsewhere' between speech/writing and image that complicates the relationship between Derrida's biographical background and the philosophical trajectory of his thought. The film is accompanied by a co-authored book, *Tourner les mots: Au bord d'un film* [*Shooting Words: One the Edge of a Film*] (2000), where Fathy and Derrida engage in a parallel deconstructive dialogue exploring both themes articulated in the film and the divergent and dissonant character of the relationship between 'the Author' (Fathy) and 'the Actor' (Derrida) as a complex interplay of identities and differences, presences and absences, translations and presentations, words and images.

I take this intriguing philosophical reception of the two Derrida films as an invitation to ask what it means for a film depicting 'the life of a philosopher' to either succeed or fail as a work of film-philosophy, that is, as a work that communicates, or enacts, philosophical ideas via cinematic means. How does a philosophical documentary – one taking a living philosopher as its subject – achieve a cinematic articulation of his or her thought? In what follows I explore these questions by taking these two films – biographical documentaries that also attempt to articulate their subject's philosophy – as my case studies. Rather than judging the films *Derrida* and *D'ailleur, Derrida* according to traditional critical discourses, my discussion will consider the problem of understanding what I shall call 'performative philosophy' in and through film: the filmmakers' contrasting attempts to present aspects of the life of the philosopher while 'screening' their thought via cinematic presentation. These

two intriguing philosophical-biographical documentaries highlight decisive issues in the 'film as philosophy' debate, especially when broadened to include non-fiction films and the idea of 'performative philosophy'. The alleged 'failure' of Dick and Kofman's *Derrida* as 'insufficiently philosophical', and the apparent 'success' of Fathy's *D'ailleur, Derrida* in communicating philosophy cinematically (both claims that I question in what follows), raise the question of the relationship between film and philosophy, and how we might think through this relationship as a cinematic performance of thought. I suggest in conclusion that, while both documentaries can be described as 'performative' – combining non-traditional documentary techniques, narrative elements and reflexive presentational styles – Dick and Kofman's *Derrida* enacts a deconstructive 'performativity' – presenting cinematic performances of philosophy while reflexively contesting these performances – that is closer in spirit to Derrida's deconstructive mode of thought. On the other hand, Fathy's *D'ailleur, Derrida*, is more respectfully attuned to Derrida's thought, 'following' him in thought, word and deed allowing him as 'the Actor' to 'script' the film in concert with 'the Author'. This 'subordination' of the film to the philosopher thereby allows for a more complex exploration of Derrida's identity as an 'outsider' not only within the French and Anglophone philosophical worlds, but in relation to his background as an Algerian Jewish/Marrano thinker – someone concerned to probe the boundaries between philosophy and its other, between Europe and the Jewish-Muslim Mediterranean worlds. At the same time, this very 'success' in faithfully portraying Derrida's life and thought also marks a certain 'failure' to contest – in a performative manner – Derrida's deconstructive thinking. Although both films engage in cinematic thinking, I shall suggest that Dick and Kofman's *Derrida* is more engaged with and attuned to the *performativity* of deconstructive thought.

Performative Philosophy

Interest in the relationship between film and philosophy has focused largely on fictional narrative film. Far less attention has been given to documentary, where recent work has focused on questions of truth and representation, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, the possibility of objectivity versus the role of subjectivity, and the ethics of representation and of spectatorship (see Carroll 1997; Cooper 2006; Currie 1999b; Nichols 2001; Plantinga 1996; Renov 2004; Saxton 2008; Winston 2000). It is striking, moreover, how little attention has been given to recent documentary film

that explicitly engages with philosophers and their work, films that examine and enact, by cinematic means, the relationship between film and philosophy and whether film can contribute to philosophical understanding.[3] The most interesting examples of such film focus not only on the 'persona' of the philosopher, his or her manner of articulating and communicating ideas, but attempt to stage a dialogue between filmmaker and thinker (as well as the viewer), or between image and idea. They do so in order to communicate not only the living presence of the thinker but also to convey, using cinematic means, something of the conceptual meaning and abstract complexity of their thought. Such films should make inviting case studies for the exploration of the relationship between film and philosophy, and indeed invite such responses not only from viewers but, I would suggest, from philosophers themselves.

With a growing number of these films being made, some by highly celebrated filmmakers – such as Michel Gondry's *Is the Man That Is Tall Happy?* (2014), a whimsical and imaginative animated film-philosophical conversation with Noam Chomsky – it is worth giving them the philosophical attention they deserve. Are such films too obviously or directly 'philosophical' to be of interest to philosophers? Is it that they are deemed manifestly pedagogical or populist and so beneath philosophical notice? I take this relative silence on the part of philosophical film theorists as an invitation to open up a dialogue with these films and to explore the manner in which they might be understood as 'performing' philosophy or engaging in what I shall call 'performative philosophy' on film.[4] I do not mean that they simply show philosophers engaging in philosophical discussion but rather that they respond to and communicate philosophical ideas in creative cinematic terms. These films are philosophical insofar as they enact or perform thinking via cinematic means, and at the same time heighten our responsiveness to the world via aesthetic sense-making practices. They add important insights to the 'film as philosophy' debate, and thus deserve further attention from philosophers and film theorists alike.

The 'Derrida' Documentaries

The relationship between film and philosophy arises as a compelling question as soon as one considers non-fictional films that take philosophers as their subject. What would it mean to perform philosophy on and with film? Are philosophical documentaries possible? These questions haunt Kirby Dick

and Amy Kofman's *Derrida* (2002), which takes as its subject the life and thought of the late French philosopher.[5] This unremarkable and conventional title, however, encrypts the film's difficult, even irresolvable, question: What is the relationship between 'Derrida', signifying the archive of texts signed by the author Jacques Derrida; 'Derrida', signifying the manner and movement of thought for which the term deconstruction has come to stand; and 'Derrida' as the proper name designating the author of those works as well as the empirical individual, born in Algiers in 1930 and who died in 2004, a couple of years after the film was completed. A film like *Derrida* seems to address these related meanings at once, the name 'Derrida' serving to encompass them all as well as naming the enigmatic 'subject' whose distinctive face, voice and gestures provide, for the most part, the visual and dramatic subject-matter of the film.

Composed of a heterogeneous assemblage of interviews, seminar recordings, *vérité* footage, staged improvisations and lyrical sequences framed by quotations from Derrida's texts, the film is also accompanied by an evocative musical score composed by Ryuichi Sakamoto. It joins a small body of films that take as their subject living philosophers, and which thereby provide a rich opportunity to explore the relationship between philosophy and film. We might call this microgenre of non-fiction films one that explores 'performative philosophy': films that attempt to 'perform' philosophy on and with film, indeed to show instances of 'performance philosophy' in a manner akin to performance art.[6] They depict philosophers 'performing' their ideas on camera but, more importantly, explore different ways of communicating or conveying (that is to say, performing) these ideas via audiovisual means. Although mostly based on interviews combined with voiceover recitations of philosophical texts, some also deploy fictional elements in order to portray (dead) philosophers or imagined episodes from philosophers' lives. Among these I would include Ken McMullen's *Ghost Dance* (1983), Derek Jarman's *Wittgenstein* (1993), Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001), David Barison and Daniel Ross' *The Ister* (2004), Astra Taylor's *Zizek!* (2005) and *Examined Life* (2008), Sophie Fiennes *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006), Michel Gondry's documentary on Noam Chomsky, *Is the Man Who Is Tall Happy?* (2010), Tao Ruspoli's *Being-in-the-World* (2010), as well as Safaa Fathy's *Derrida's Elsewhere* [*D'ailleur, Derrida*] (2001).[7]

Like many of these hybrid films – neither strictly documentary, biopic, essay film nor fictional work but combining elements of each – Dick and Kofman's film *Derrida* has elicited ambivalent responses among viewers and

critics. Perhaps the dominant tone in most critical responses was a noticeable discomfort concerning the question of its philosophical, rather than cinematic, status. This ambivalence is clearly evident, for example, in Roden's review article (2003) in the online journal *Film-Philosophy*. As remarked, he acknowledges the film's attempts to explore the boundary between the biographical and the philosophical, indeed its ambitions to perform a visual deconstruction via its reflexive framings of the various interviews, lectures, quotations and reality TV vignettes composing the film. While acknowledging its sensitivity to the 'constructed or mediated nature of the image', Roden (2003) echoes many critics in lamenting *Derrida's* failure to engage in 'philosophical discussion and analysis', hence dismisses the film for being 'insufficiently philosophical'. This is a curious but revealing criticism: it is clear that the film is assumed to be presenting philosophical ideas, and that in order to do so it must find ways to articulate and explain such ideas. The criticism assumes, however, that it is clear what such a cinematic presentation of ideas should be or to what extent the documentary is obliged to contextualise, describe or explain such ideas in recognisably 'philosophical' terms. It is far from obvious, however, what it means to deal with the relationship between film and philosophy, or what it means for a film to deal with all of the issues – philosophical, biographical and cinematic – clustered around the name 'Derrida' in the senses I have noted above. The manner in which philosophical ideas might be 'screened' or projected via cinematic means is what such a documentary both raises and puts into question.

Spectres of Derrida

Roden's critique, moreover, raises the question of what it means for a documentary concerned with a philosopher to succeed or fail 'philosophically' (which is a different question as to whether it succeeds cinematically). As remarked, the assumption here is that such a film should engage in 'philosophical discussion and analysis', via cinematic means, yet in a manner also recognisable as 'philosophy'. As we saw in Chapter 8, this is a contestable claim; there are many debates both examining and challenging the view that film can, let alone should, make something like philosophical 'arguments' albeit by visual means (see, for example, Livingston 2006; Mulhall 2008: 129–155; Sinnerbrink 2011a: 120–135; Smuts 2009b; Wartenberg 2007: 15–31). Moreover, there is the question of how to make a film about a thinker who contested the notion of autobiography and radically questioned our

culture's tendency to anchor the meaning of a work to an author's intentions, psychology or biography (see Derrida 1993). What happens when a film is made about an author whose work does not readily yield to cinematic translation, yet whose persona presents a fascinating occasion for cinematic portraiture and visual archiving?[8] The temptation to 'hero worship' is ever present, one that such documentaries on the 'lives of the philosophers' must always strive to avoid, which Dick and Kofman try to do, although not always successfully.[9]

On the other hand, as Derrida remarks in the film (and in his work), philosophy, unlike, say, literary criticism or art history, has traditionally avoided admitting the personal, the biographical or the psychological into the sphere of critical analysis or interpretation. We do not usually credit, say, Kant's punctiliousness concerning his famous afternoon stroll, Hegel's fathering of an illegitimate child, Marx's youthful efforts at poetry, Nietzsche's unrequited passion for Lou Salome, Hannah Arendt's affair with Heidegger (see Ettinger 1997) or Foucault's LSD trip in Death Valley (see Penner 2019) with having any explicit *philosophical* significance, whatever other psychological, biographical or cultural insights these intriguing and fascinating biographical events might offer.[10] Despite the ancient tradition of instruction through philosophical example – the pedagogy of the anecdote, found in classic texts such as Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* – modern philosophy eschews any consort with biography as strictly outside the domain of philosophy proper. Even today, philosophical or intellectual biography, while persistently popular, is sometimes regarded with both acknowledgment and ambivalence from a philosophical point of view.[11] Nonetheless, these fascinating texts, combining narration, biographical detail, literary anecdote, and philosophical interpretation remain borderline or hybrid disciplinary works, texts whose status between philosophy and non-philosophy remains contested, uncertain, perhaps undecidable – features that are compounded further when such a project is translated into the medium of cinema.

Indeed, matters become more complicated, in a different way, when we consider what happens when a filmmaker attempts to produce a philosophical documentary not on one of 'the mighty dead' but on a still-living philosopher, capturing his or her persona, physiognomy, mannerisms, speech, gestures and vital presence on film (as Astra Taylor's philosophical documentaries do so successfully). What happens when a film is made about an author whose oeuvre is not yet closed, whose chosen medium of thought (the written text) does not readily offer itself to translation into the medium of film, yet whose

persona presents a fascinating occasion for cinematic portraiture and visual archiving? What can film do with such a philosopher/philosophy?

Some of these questions are touched on, albeit obliquely, in Derrida's own work. His co-authored text with Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television* (2002), for example, explores the deconstructive dimensions of televisual technology as a form of prosthetic mediation that creates the illusion of presence while collapsing time and distance via audiovisual representation. Using filmed interviews with Derrida and textual transcriptions of their discussions, Stiegler and Derrida articulate, in a performative manner, the intermedial complexities that arise in the technologically mediated translation between image and writing. Derrida, moreover, has appeared on film before, notably in Ken McMullen's *Ghost Dance* (1983). As Derrida remarks, in a well-known vignette from *Ghost Dance*, cinema is 'an art of ghosts, a battle of phantoms'.[12] The fascination of cinematic presentation lies in the play between presence and absence, the image of an absent figure who possesses a ghostly presence, the impression of immediacy and virtual reality we experience that depends upon mechanical or digital recording, editing and screening. And the complexities multiply with a documentary presenting the figure of the philosopher, documenting the individual behind the texts, while emphasising the constructed character of this persona and the enigmatic relationship between image, word and idea within any such audiovisual presentation.

Cinema as 'Ghost Dance'

Cinema is a medium in many senses: of the moving image, of the living dead; a presentation, through moving images extended in time, of an absent presence; it discloses a world, or worlds, to which we remain forever absent; it opens up a visual, temporal, memorial communication with the spectral dead, who are nonetheless 'present' in the image, indeed both present and absent at once. *Derrida*, the film, cannot help but confront these ghostly presences, submit to this battle of phantoms, staging an encounter in which we remain unsure whether we are witnessing an act of love or of hostility, of antagonism or of acknowledgment. Are we witnessing a filmmaker trying to 'capture' the reluctant philosopher or the artful philosopher trying to dodge, resist or subvert this act of representation? It is this very drama unfolding between filmmaker and subject that constitutes much of the dramatic, and even philosophical, interest (and meaning) of the film.

Indeed we might describe the phantom presences haunting the film *Derrida* as philosophy and film themselves: partners but also adversaries who establish an intriguing but ambivalent relationship. As we have seen, film and philosophy seem, at first glance, to be foreign, even incompatible media; ever since Plato's Cave, the relationship between images and ideas has been a fraught and difficult one. In the case of a film focusing on a thinker and his thought, it is hard to say whether this is a contest between rivals or a communion between friends or even lovers. Certainly the amorous intention is to be found more on the filmmakers' side rather than the philosopher's. Throughout the near decade it took Dick and Kofman to make *Derrida*, Derrida, the film's central but elusive 'subject', frequently shows his reluctance, discomfort and exasperation with the intrusions and demands involved in being the subject of the film, and in being asked to do or perform certain things, repeatedly, before the camera. A constant refrain throughout concerns 'difficulty': 'It is very difficult', Derrida remarks, whether in response to a question concerning how he and his wife, Marguerite, met, or being suddenly asked to improvise 'anything you like on love'. 'Amy, you can't do this!' Derrida objects. 'At least ask me a question!' Derrida's reluctantly improvised soliloquy on love, which concerns the difference between the 'who' and the 'what', loving someone for their absolute singularity or for their attributes and qualities, is discomfiting to watch. One has the impression of having intruded into an uncomfortably personal but fractious space between filmmaker and subject, as though we were witness to a personal conflict, even a lover's quarrel. I shall return to this question of love, for the film, in a sense, is a love story between film and philosophy, albeit a tale of unrequited love, where the lover, as Roland Barthes observes, is the one who waits, and where the object of that love – 'Derrida', and all that the name stands for – tries to elude, thwart, or resist that offer of love. What unfolds on screen in *Derrida* is suggestive of a (philosophical) melodrama - scenes from a marriage.

Derrida, as both Goodenough (2005: 6) and Strathausen (2009) remark, is therefore clearly something other than a conventional documentary: it does not simply record the philosopher's response to interview-style questions, but reflexively deconstructs the very act of trying to film such a figure, drawing attention to the mediated, staged and rehearsed character of the philosopher's speech and performance on screen (as I discuss at greater length below). Critics who claim that *Derrida* is insufficiently philosophical have overlooked this important aspect of the film. They have not attended to the reflexive devices and strategies the film adopts that contribute to reflecting or enacting a form of thought that both 'mirrors' what Derrida is

saying but also puts these speech acts into question. It is the 'performative' nature of this task, I suggest, that constitutes the philosophical significance of this *Derrida* documentary, although one should use the term 'philosophical' here with caution. After all, Derrida is a philosopher whose work is dedicated to the deconstruction – the reversal/undermining and displacement/re-inscription – of key conceptual foundations within Western philosophy, and so hardly a thinker whose work could be called 'philosophical' without further ado.

This is why I approach *Derrida* as an attempt to 'perform philosophy' on film, to 'screen' philosophy by way of cinematic presentation, which can also mean to represent, stage or mimic philosophy, without being identical to philosophy as such. From this point of view, the film shows the impossibility of fully representing the life of a philosopher, or the performance of philosophical thought, in a manner recognisable as 'philosophy'. Does this make the film a failure? Paradoxically, we could say that its 'failure' as a work of cinema is also a mark of its success as a film-philosophical work. Its deconstructive aspect is not only found in the film's reflexive framing of Derrida's interviews, lectures and texts, but in Derrida's own complex 'ghost dance' with the film, with his own image and with the filmmakers: a case of deconstruction enacted via cinematic and philosophical performance.

The paradox to which the film opens itself could be put as follows: to succeed as a philosophical documentary would be to fail to deconstruct this genre, for then the film would have demonstrated the sufficiency of the genre to address its subject – namely, the life and thought of the philosopher, Derrida. To fail as a philosophical documentary, by contrast, opens up the possibility of deconstructing this genre, of the film deconstructing itself as a philosophical documentary, which would be to demonstrate the impossibility of the very task that the film seeks to undertake – namely, to show the manner in which the life and work of a thinker might be captured adequately on film. To succeed is to fail, whereas to fail is the only way, perhaps, the film can succeed in its task, even though it remains unclear what it would mean here, precisely, to succeed. What appears as a love story is perhaps also a tragic one.

The Sex Lives of Philosophers

What kind of tragic love story unfolds for us here? The question of love is broached several times in the film, notably during one of the more intriguing

interviews that punctuate it. Amy Kofman, the filmmaker herself a character in the film, asks Derrida what sort of question he would like a philosophical documentary to have asked of one the great dead philosophers, say Hegel, Heidegger or Nietzsche. After a telling pause, improvising 'a quick answer', Derrida replies: 'their sex lives'. 'Why?' Kofman asks. 'Because they don't want to talk about it', Derrida explains, with an almost defiant glance, knowing what the reply will be. When Kofman responds by asking whether *he* would like to answer such a question, Derrida shifts tack, replying that he didn't say he would answer such a question. Truth, after all, prefers to remain veiled; decency demands a respectful distance. But as Derrida goes on to remark, if we are to get further into the question of the relationship between biography and philosophy, it will require of us a certain impoliteness, overcoming that politeness which excludes the personal, the amorous, the sexual, from the domain of philosophy proper. At this point, the film takes up the cause, holding its ground against Derrida's subtle attempt to both control and defuse the situation. Now it is the film that must violate the *cordon sanitaire* protecting the philosopher in his ascetic mastery; it too shall have to be impolite, indiscreet or indecent. There is more to this ghost dance than meets the eye. Kofman's retort to Derrida's provocation, the film's insistence on questioning the philosopher and undermining his subtle attempts to control the narrative, are telling: although they make for a 'lesser' cinematic experience – the film is more fractious, disjointed, conflictual and 'improvised' than Safaa Fathy's more artfully composed, poetic and respectful collaboration with Derrida – the film performs a more explicitly thought-provoking form of 'cinematic thinking'. Film here refuses to be a silent or passive (dance) partner to philosophy.

Improvisation

There is an important sequence in the film where this question of love, of the amorous but 'difficult' relationship between film and philosophy, is addressed in a manner that is at once explicit and reserved. It serves as an illuminating instance of what Stephen Mulhall (2008: 3–11) has called 'film in the condition of philosophy': film questioning itself as to its nature, its possibilities as a medium, in this case, of how film might perform philosophy, or what I am calling 'performative philosophy'. The sequence in question is framed by a fascinating one on the topic of 'improvisation', another theme explicitly addressed within the film. Here too the film

attempts to perform what it depicts; a performance, rather than mere recording, of philosophy. Against a jerky, blurry sequence of images, deliberately refusing us a clear 'masterful' or 'professional' view of the scene (Derrida on his couch watching television and opening his mail), Kofman recites a text taken from an unpublished 1982 interview with Derrida dealing with improvisation:

> It's not easy to improvise; it's the most difficult thing to do. Even when one improvises in front of a camera or a microphone, one ventriloquises, or leaves another to speak in one's place, the schemas and languages that are already there. . . All the names are already pre-programmed. It's already the names that inhibit our ability to ever really improvise. One can't say whatever one wants; one is obliged, more or less, to reproduce the stereotypical discourse. And so I believe in improvisation and I fight for improvisation; but always with the belief that it's impossible. And there where there is improvisation, I am not able to see myself; I am blind to myself. . . It's for others to see. The one who has improvised here, no, I won't ever see him.
>
> *Derrida* 2002, 59:44–1:01:18

Here, as in other sequences, the film fitfully enacts the 'impossibility' of improvisation, its condition of possibility requiring the reiteration pre-existing forms of discourse, of history and culture, of proper names; yet also the necessity of acknowledging improvisation as an expression of spontaneity, creativity and invention that is worth affirming, preserving and defending. This becomes even more acute once we consider that improvisation could also be described as something that philosophy has traditionally repressed (argument is hardly improvised), regarding it, perhaps, as something belonging more to (modern) art, theatre and music (or film!). The film, moreover, keeps forcing Derrida to improvise, a forcing that Derrida both refuses and repeats, improvising despite himself, a forced improvisation that is hardly in the spirit of the term, performing for the camera in a manner that is controlled or even, at times, contrived. This performative demonstration of the 'impossibility' of improvisation that Derrida's texts describe is a striking instance of how the film's 'failure' is, paradoxically, also a mark of its success. A perfectly executed instance of philosophical 'improvisation' – carefully prepared and subtly edited – would hardly count as what Derrida claims improvisation to be; by contrast, the forced, difficult, even 'failed' improvisation that the film captures – awkward and messy as it is, riven by gaps and underlying conflicts, while nonetheless composed and edited as all shots and sequences are – gets closer to the 'truth' of the paradoxical character of improvisation. This is especially true of an

improvisation of philosophical discourse that is explicitly presented as part of a documentary film exploring the difficult relationship between film and philosophy, while also attempting to enter into a cinematic dialogue with the philosopher's distinctive mode of thought.

Echo and Narcissus

To return to love, the film then follows, or perhaps echoes, the sequence on improvisation with one on the myth of Echo and Narcissus. Here again it is a question of film 'in the condition of philosophy', or what I am calling, rather, film as *performing* philosophy. It is not simply a matter of illustrating but of attempting to perform – enact or actualise – via cinematic means the kind of thinking that Derrida is articulating. What such an approach involves is a kind of cross-medial dialogue, a performative interaction or audiovisual 'dance' between image and concept that attempts to display, elaborate and communicate thinking using the devices of the medium in conjunction with the discourse of the philosopher. The myth of Echo and Narcissus thus serves as a suggestive metaphor for the kind of complex interaction that unfolds here between filmmakers and their subject, or between film and philosophy more generally.

Framed by a scene showing, from below, the camera crew in a room, Derrida appears standing aside a mirror, playing Narcissus to Kofman's Echo as he 'improvises' a response to her question concerning the myth in question, which Derrida reads as a parable on the relationship between image and voice, 'between light and speech, between the reflection and the mirror'. This question is prefigured earlier in the film when Derrida is asked about his response to a portrait presented to him by an artist-friend. 'It is uncanny, but I want to say, *j'accepte*, I accept. . . Little narcissist that I am!' he jokes. In the Echo and Narcissus sequence, the camera pans from Derrida's reflection in the mirror to his 'original' image and back again, the philosopher and his double; the double being not only his image but that of film itself as double or echo of philosophy, of the (narcissistic) philosopher improvising a performance on film. This is both a cinematic and philosophical performance meditating on the relationship between image and voice, light and speech, reflection and mirror; but it is also one in which the film itself reflects upon the philosopher's discourse, offering a visual or cinematic accompaniment or response to the verbal presentation of ideas. Such a task is of course difficult and risky: difficult to do justice to the complexity of philosophical

discourse, and risky in the sense of always courting the charge of 'mere illustration' or obvious visual exemplification. It is also difficult to watch the filmmakers and the philosopher engaged in this complex dance, one that threatens to express tension and misunderstanding as much as dialogue or communication. The sequence also echoes the myth: the film as Echo and the philosopher as Narcissus, the one doomed to repeat the phrases of the other, the other to contemplate his own reflection, his image, without being able to get beyond himself, his own mirror of self-presentation, ultimately rejecting Echo's vain – and truncated – offer of love.

Narcissus remains forever trapped by his own reflection: the tears of Narcissus, Derrida remarks, are thus tears of a solipsist; Narcissus (and perhaps also the philosopher reflecting on him) cries because he can only ever see himself (or his own image). As Derrida remarks, this is precisely what is happening in this scene, in this film, Kofman posing questions, Derrida repeating answers (now claiming the role of Echo), the camera panning between image and reflection, although here it is philosophy who plays both Echo and Narcissus – another instance of the philosopher's solipsism, perhaps. Echo, however, in her loving cleverness, finds a way to catch Narcissus. She speaks by reciting his words, words that, through this recitation, become her own, a way of signing or marking her love. The film too repeats Derrida's words, echoes his image, his improvisation, and in doing so makes them belong to film; the image becoming philosophical just as the philosopher's performance echoes his own image, which is thereby undone. To speak is not to see, Derrida observes. Does Derrida not see what his words are saying, what his image is showing, in Echo's repetitions of his words, his image, her signing of her love?

The film stages and reflects the scene of Echo and Narcissus as an instance of film performing philosophy: an invitation for philosophy to open itself to the performances of film, and for film to adopt and repeat ('echo') the performances of philosophy. Kofman and Derrida, *Derrida* and Derrida, are like quarrelling friends or lovers who speak to, and talk past, each other, and yet who, for all their intimacy, cannot see each other. The film and the philosopher echo each other, becoming bound through repetition, yet remaining as blind to each other as they are to themselves. How can two blind people love each other? Derrida asks. That is the question. How can Echo and Narcissus, film and philosophy, love each other? The film's answer is evident in this awkward and difficult encounter: an ambiguous exchange between image and word, between filmmaker and philosopher, yet one that is also a cinematic performance of thought.

D'ailleurs, Derrida [*Derrida's Elsewhere*][13]

The other Derrida documentary I wish to discuss presents a fascinating contrast. Egyptian poet and filmmaker Safaa Fathy's *D'ailleurs, Derrida* [*Derrida's Elsewhere*] (1999), which received far less critical attention than Dick and Kofman's *Derrida*, is in many ways a superior film.[14] As Marguerite La Caze observes, if one had to categorise it, 'it would be as a documentary art film that could be treated as a meditation on philosophical themes from Derrida's work, weaving and juxtaposing these themes with the biographical elements and creating a poetic and evocative work of art' (2019: 155). It offers an eloquent portrait of Derrida, giving him ample space to discuss his ideas, showing different facets of his identity as an Algerian-Jewish philosopher, both personal and institutional, ethical and cultural-political, while expressing the idea of an 'elsewhere' central to how the images and spoken words are articulated in the film. It successfully relates thought and image, film and philosophy, in a harmonious and respectful manner, where the filmmaker discreetly veils her perspective, subordinating the film's images and sound to the thinker's words and gestures.

Is this the best way, however, to think about the relationship between film and philosophy, image and thought? Although far from the ethical ideal of mutual recognition and respect, one might wonder whether this relationship between film and philosophy functions 'better' when one partner subordinates their perspective to that of the other. What happens when film 'subordinates' itself to philosophy, or the documentary image allows itself to be 'scripted' by the thinker? We observe this intriguing interaction in *D'ailleurs, Derrida*, which was praised as succeeding (cinematically and philosophically) whereas Dick and Kofman's *Derrida* was said to have 'failed'. As remarked, it is difficult to define what, precisely, is meant by evaluations of each film's relative success or failure in this respect, but at the very least it implies that the film succeeds (or fails) to not only convey the life of the thinker but to reflect and express in specifically cinematic terms their philosophical thinking. It would mean succeeding as 'film-philosophy' in the sense of communicating philosophical ideas via cinematic means. As remarked, we might find that the 'success' of a film in performing 'cinematic thinking' may not correspond with its cinematic success. Alternatively, a cinematically successful film might involve a less successful mode of cinematic thinking, suggesting that there are cases where

philosophical and cinematic aims may be at odds, or where succeeding in one respect involves compromising the other.

Nonetheless, most critics assume that there is a consonance or correspondence between the philosophical and cinematic dimensions of such documentaries concerned with the life and thought of a philosopher. Indeed, the film, as La Caze adroitly observes, is less a philosophical biography than 'an attempt at a genuine collaboration to explore the relation between philosophy and film, where Derrida reflects on film and its unique qualities, and Fathy enables spectators to understand and question Derrida's philosophy' (2019: 155). In his thoughtful and nuanced review discussion of *D'ailleurs, Derrida*, for example, David Wills (2004) concurs with this assessment, drawing the following conclusion about the film's achievements:

> Safaa Fathy. . . makes a film that preserves on one level the coherence and cogency of Derrida's work, highlighting it against a vivid series of autobiographical backdrops, particularly the North African, and the triple elsewhere of Abrahamic cultures – Islamic, Jewish and Christian – that is Toledo. In this way she manages to double the biography of Derrida with her own Egyptian background. But she succeeds also in another more powerful doubling, what amounts to a double writing, that of a cinema of her own that, while following Derrida, both his body and the logic of his words, fills the screen with images, of desert, of ruins, and of the ocean, that appear as something like the aporetic hauntings of those words, something perhaps of their excised unconscious, something that functions within the perspective of a pardon and a healing.
>
> Wills 2004: Paragraph 10

Wills alludes here to Fathy's success in preserving and articulating Derrida's philosophical work against the backdrop of his biographical history in Algeria and the threefold cultural 'elsewhere' of Islamic, Jewish and Christian culture in Spain. The filmmaker's own background shadows or 'doubles' Derrida's biographical ruminations, while the film itself, in 'following Derrida' (literally, metaphorically, as well as conceptually) offers a cinematic reflection or meditation on his work – figured in poetic images of desert landscapes, melancholy ruins, the volatile sea, which offer a visual accompaniment to his discourse, another perspective that displaces the philosopher's words to a (cinematic) 'elsewhere'. This thoughtful comment on Fathy's film, moreover, is supplemented by further examples of the film's subordination of its own perspective to that of Derrida, foregrounding his autobiographical reflections and his discussion of philosophical ideas. For Wills, this perspective involves an acknowledgment of the Other that moves

beyond conventional documentary and echoes the (Derridian/Levinasian) notions of 'witnessing' and 'testimony':

> Safaa Fathy has been particularly sensitive to that question [the question of 'speaking as a witness'] in making her film, and in making the choices of her film, reducing to a minimum her own interventions so as to produce an archival document that is neither biography, curriculum vitae, or even précis of an oeuvre, but first and foremost testimony.
>
> Wills 2004: Paragraph 1[15]

There is no doubt that Fathy's film has a poise and lyricism that deserves praise; it establishes a relationship between filmmaker and subject that is revealing and intimate, an act of witnessing or of 'testimony' regarding Derrida that is more harmonious and respectful than what one finds in Dirk and Kofman's *Derrida*. Although sharing much with the latter, *D'ailleurs, Derrida* is nonetheless a more conventional philosophical biography that is at pains to foreground Derrida the man, his physical presence and manner of speaking, focusing on his Algerian heritage and familial memories, using visual imagery and temporal sequencing to evoke a sense of place, to probe the complex notion of identity (including 'philosophical' identity as a Marrano Jew) and to question the legacy of colonialism/post-colonialism in a European/North African context. It also explores, both via Derrida's expository discourse and via audiovisual means, the ideas of confession, witnessing, place, autobiography and the 'elsewhere' that haunts personal identity as well as philosophy itself.

The marrying of image and idea, of film and subject, in *D'ailleur, Derrida* is poetic and expressive: there are long shots of Derrida walking alone against a desolate windswept 'Algerian' landscape (although actually filmed in Spain), accompanied by atmospheric and poignant soundtrack; talking thoughtfully to camera against a picturesque ocean background, framed by cliffs, sky and palm trees; a domestic sequence where Derrida takes the filmmaker – who remains deliberately absent, except for a couple of 'accidental' moments, from the frame – on a revealing tour of his personal library (which he describes as 'sublime' in the sense of nearing a limit of imagination and sense), ruminations on El Greco, even a touching sequence showing us (and her), along with his wife Marguerite, the improvised backyard graveyard for their pet cats. There are moments of subtle but candid self-reflection, as when Derrida, framed against a background of fish swimming serenely in a public aquarium, remarks that he feels the same as they do, sequestered behind glass, a captured creature on display for the

scrutiny of others; or when the camera continues to roll after one of Derrida's soliloquies, capturing him commenting and 'directing' the filmmaker, saying that he wants a certain sequence or comment to stay in the film. And so on.

In this respect *D'ailleurs, Derrida* is, on the one hand, a more engaging cinematic presentation of Derrida as its (philosophical and biographical) subject; but, on the other, in subordinating itself to its philosophical 'subject', it is not as successful, I suggest, in performing Derrida's thought on film. For it lacks those moments of interruption, displacement or subversion within the complex encounter or 'ghost dance' between philosopher and filmmaker. It avoids ambiguity or dissonance in presenting the relationship between the film and its philosophical subject, moments where the camera shifts from a relationship of recording, following or witnessing, and enters instead a space of commentary and counterpoint, disputation or disagreement – moments of evocative encounter where a 'cinematic thinking' between film and philosophy can occur.[16]

As David Wills notes (2004: Paragraph 1), Fathy's film must navigate between competing demands: those particular to any cinematic work ('its cinematic quality'); those particular to the person of Derrida himself; and those specific to Derrida's demanding form of thought. Fathy's film responds to this threefold challenge by subordinating its 'cinematic' status to those of its philosophical subject and his mode of thinking: by allowing Derrida, the man and the thinker, to 'script the film', so to speak, Fathy gives Derrida the central role, the authoritative voice and presence that defines the film. In doing so, however, in anchoring the film firmly within the horizon and perspective of the biographical-philosophical 'subject' Derrida, I suggest that her film subordinates those questions of communication and contamination, of difference and repetition, of intervention and performance that are inevitably encountered in the complex encounter between film and philosophy, especially in a philosophical documentary – moments that are explicitly manifested or performed in Dick and Kofman's *Derrida*.[17]

It is not a question, to be sure, of deciding whether one film is 'better' than the other, since these are two films with different cinematic aims and philosophical orientations. Nonetheless, the question of value and evaluation here is still relevant; for one film might be regarded as 'better' cinematically but not necessarily 'philosophically', and vice-versa. Although *D'ailleurs, Derrida* is arguably a more accomplished cinematic presentation of Derrida, we could also claim that, thanks to its explicit subordination of cinematic to philosophical concerns, or its use of more conventional cinematic presentation while allowing Derrida – the man, his persona and his speech

– to script or 'direct' the film, it is less bold or risk-taking, less disruptive, more deferential, less provocative than its rival. It eschews the possibility of questioning or provoking the thinker, but also commenting on, and elaborating cinematically, aspects of Derrida's thought – and in that sense less a case of performance philosophy than of philosophical (auto)biography in a more conventional sense.

In this 'ghost dance' between film and philosophy, the more ghost-like the filmmaker, the more prominent the thinker; the more absent the filmmaker, the more present the philosopher; the more harmonious, expressive, poetic and complementary the image, the more forthright, articulated and independent the expression of philosophical ideas. For some viewers, this might be the source of the evaluation that *D'ailleurs, Derrida* succeeds 'philosophically' whereas the other *Derrida* documentary fails. For others, by contrast, we could say that its success cinematically also marks a certain 'failure' as a work of film-philosophy, which is an encounter in which both are transformed: a complex aporetic relationship that articulates what Derrida's deconstruction is about, that enacts or performs it in cinematic terms. To be sure, both films are marked by an acknowledgment, care, respect, friendship, even a love for Derrida, for his subversive confrontation with philosophical tradition; but one is more willing to risk the relationship, strain the friendship by contesting the philosopher, to perform these gestures of (deconstructive) disruption or questioning than the other.

Performance versus Performativity

One way of summing up the difference between these two approaches is to invoke the distinction between *performance* and *performativity*: 'performance' as the conventional notion of dramatic enactment using all manner of physical, gestural and expressive elements to solicit affective-emotional responses and convey meaning; and 'performativity' as referring to a reflexive, reiterated enactment of varieties of meaning through action, gesture, speech and expression, which draws attention to its own constructed, conventional or artefactual character. The most basic (Goffmanesque) definition of performance – as encompassing any form of physical action or expression that has the capacity to influence the response of others – has, as is well known, been adapted and refined for the specific contexts and purposes of dramatic and cinematic performance. Although usually theorised with respect to fictional narrative film, documentary theorists such as Bill Nichols

and Stella Bruzzi have cited 'performance' as a key mode of contemporary documentary filmmaking practice (see Bruzzi 2000 and Nichols 1991, 2001). Indeed, the notion of performance as an important element of documentary style has been explored within recent documentary theory (see Bruzzi 2000; Grindon 2007; Marquis 2013; Nichols 2001; Waugh 1990).[18] We could extend this discussion of performance in documentary to include that of philosophers on screen: the specific manner in which philosophical documentaries both present their subjects, showing how a philosopher performs on screen, but also the way that the film presents this performance, framing or commenting on it in various ways. From this point of view, Derrida's performance represents a key element in both films' attempts to articulate, or even question, the thinker's ideas. Both films could be described as documentaries that feature a performance of philosophy: not only how Derrida communicates his thinking through speech, gesture and expression, but also the manner in which the film frames or articulates this performance of thinking on screen.

To capture this dimension of performance it is useful to turn to the concept of 'performativity', one that is itself strongly associated with Derridian deconstruction. Popularised by Judith Butler's (1990) account of identity as based on the role of reiterative socially coded performances of gendered comportment, the notion of performativity refers to the manner in which repeated self-reflexive performances of speech, action and gesture can both convey meaning as well as draw attention to its conventional or constructed character.[19] Derrida and Stiegler (2002) both allude to this dimension of performativity as constitutive of audiovisual media, which convey a sense of presence, immediacy and coherent meaning, while being thoroughly mediated, constructed and conventionalised. Although both Derrida documentaries use and foreground the role of performance in their presentation of their subject, Dick and Kofman's *Derrida* is more explicitly performative in the sense of enacting a *deconstructive* performativity: it not only highlights but also reflexively frames and subverts Derrida's verbal performance of thought before the camera in a manner that is cinematic rather than discursive.

This offers us a lucid way of distinguishing between these two otherwise comparable philosophical documentaries. On the one hand, we have Fathy's respectful witnessing of Derrida as hybrid philosophical subject, an anomalous thinker whose identity is always already marked by an 'elsewhere'; a cinematic gesture of acknowledgment or witnessing that allows the philosopher's words and gestures to direct or 'script' the performance of the

film as an expression of the 'elsewhere' shaping Derrida's life, identity and thought. On the other, we have Dick and Kofman's *Derrida* as a case where performance and performativity interfere with one another in the deconstructive encounter, creating a more ambiguous, inconsistent, disruptive presentation of Derrida: one that thereby remains more 'true' to deconstructive thought in destabilising the coherence of the philosophical 'subject' it attempts to portray.

We can thus return to my original comments on the relative failure and success of these two films from the viewpoint of film-philosophy: Fathy's *D'ailleurs Derrida* succeeds in being more successful in capturing the *performance* of thinking through film, but at the cost of downplaying the deconstructive *performativity* that this thought attempts to articulate. Dick and Kofman's *Derrida* 'fails' as a work of cinema in that it is more inconsistent and interruptive in its documentary engagement with its subject, but in so doing it succeeds in articulating the deconstructive *performativity* of Derrida's thinking, finding specifically cinematic means of articulating the operation of deconstructive thought, even where this interferes with Derrida's performance on screen. In this sense, it succeeds as a work of film-philosophy despite its shortcomings from a strictly cinematic point of view. No less than one would expect from a documentary work dedicated to performing cinematic thinking.

Epilogue: In Praise of Amateurs

Philosophy has always had a vexed relationship with autobiography. Indeed, biography has sometimes been regarded as the preserve of 'amateurs' in the etymological sense, namely, those with a love or passion for their subject, who remain on the fringes of academe precisely because of this passion. A frequent criticism of *Derrida*, the film, for example, was its all-too-palpable passion for its subject, its flirtation with 'hero worship', its indulgence in the 'cult' of the master thinker, its 'lack of competing voices' – in a word, its love for 'Derrida', in all senses of the name. *D'ailleurs, Derrida* too expresses a great devotion to its subject, a deference and acknowledgment that could also be described as an expression of love or friendship. One might say that both films are the work of devoted 'amateurs' (*amateur* derives from the 16th century French term meaning 'one who loves', 'lover'), as opposed to the 'professional' documentarian, critic or philosopher, whose passion must remain discreetly veiled, politely excluded from the work of filmmaking,

criticism or philosophy, which, according to convention, should adopt a professionally competent, detached distance from its subject matter.

At the same time, however, such love or passion does not necessarily equate with devotion or respectful acknowledgment; it may also involve questioning, conflict and ambivalence. In this respect, both films offer us different senses of the film-philosophy relationship in the biographical documentary. The one is poetic, articulate, deferential and respectful; the other contestatory, disruptive, awkward and ambivalent. Both articulate different although complementary ethical and aesthetic stances towards the subject of 'Derrida' (the man, the thinker, but also the founder of deconstruction), and both can be regarded also as works of love, expressing both a love of philosophy and of film, and of the possibilities of communication, however ambiguous and conflicted, between them.

How to film a philosophical (auto)biography? How to create a work of cinematic thinking? Should one be 'professional' or an 'amateur'? As Roland Barthes writes in his own autobiography (1977: 52): 'The Amateur (someone who engages in painting, music, sport, science, without the spirit of mastery or competition)', is one who repeats or 'renews his pleasure (*amator*: one who loves again and again); he is anything but a hero (of creation, of performance); he establishes himself graciously (for nothing) in the signifier', which is to say, within cinema. For us, this means in the image, in the performance of thought, or indeed within cinematic thinking. We can see this in both *Derrida* documentaries, however they differ in showing and examining both the performance and the performativity of deconstructive thought. Let us praise, then, those remarkable cinematic 'amateurs' who have dedicated their love to filming the spectres of 'Derrida', and those anonymous lovers of film and philosophy who remain captivated by, but also question, this love.

11

Planet *Melancholia*: Romanticism, Mood and Cinematic Ethics

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Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* is not only a remarkable study of depression, it offers a fascinating exploration of cinematic romanticism and the aesthetics of cinematic moods. With its peculiar fusion of *Dogme*-style melodrama and apocalyptic disaster movie, Schopenhauerian pessimism and German romanticism, Bergmanesque psychodrama and art cinema experimentation, *Melancholia* projects an enchanted cinematic world dedicated to the disenchanting idea of world-destruction. The film does so by presenting a devastating portrait of depressive melancholia, dramatizing the main character Justine's [Kirsten Dunst's] pathological experience of a 'loss of world' that finds its objective correlative in a sublime cinematic fantasy of world-annihilation. This strong parallel between feminine depression and the idea of world-sacrifice, between Justine's experience of depressive

melancholia and the destruction of the Earth by the planet Melancholia, evokes a remarkable experience of aesthetic sublimity.[1] In what follows I analyse some of the aesthetic and philosophical strands of *Melancholia*, focusing in particular on the film's remarkable Prelude, arguing that it explores the experience of nihilism and performs a complex ethical critique of rationalist optimism in the guise of a neo-romantic allegory of world-destruction. At the same time, *Melancholia* is a work dedicated to the traumatic 'working through' of the loss of worlds – cinematic but also cultural and natural – that characterises our historical mood, one that might be described as a deflationary apocalypticism or a condition of melancholy mourning. Indeed, a number of critics have noted not only the aesthetic and theological aspects of *Melancholia* but also its environmental and ethico-political resonances (Latour 2011; Matts and Tynan 2012; Read 2014). In my exploration of the aesthetic, philosophical and ethical strands of *Melancholia*, I reflect upon its use of romanticism and of cinematic mood, showing how different readings of the film – from cognitivist analyses (Grodal 2012) and anti-capitalist (Shaviro 2012) to ecocritical interpretations (Read 2012) – are responding to its arresting evocation of mood which has both aesthetic and ethical significance. Von Trier's film explores not only the aesthetics of melancholia but its ethical dimensions, creating an art disaster movie whose sublime depiction of world-destruction has the paradoxical ethical effect of revealing the fragility and finitude of life on Earth and our duty to care for it.

'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Cinema . . .'[2]

One of the more intriguing phenomena in contemporary cinema has been the resurgence of the apocalyptic disaster movie (see Sinnerbrink 2014d). This has been a recurring topic in the movies, a subgenre of science fiction typically featuring religious, ideological and, more recently, economic and ecological themes. Apocalyptic fiction, in the modern sense, dates back to the 19th century. The most famous exemplar is Mary Shelley's novel, *The Last Man* (1826), a post-apocalyptic 'last man standing' narrative including critical reflections on romanticism and humanism.[3] We could also mention Edgar Allen Poe's early science fiction story, 'The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion' (1836), in which the two eponymous characters have a

posthumous conversation about the response of humankind to the destruction of the world due to a comet strike.[4] As is well known, movies have long been fascinated by apocalyptic tales. The 1950s saw a wave of popular apocalyptic disaster movies, typically featuring alien invasion/War of the Worlds scenarios, or fatal viral-biological epidemics, but also exploring cosmic catastrophes in which a random astronomical event destroys life on Earth. Rudolf Maté's *When Worlds Collide* (1951), for example, features a newly discovered planet, called Bellus, set on a collision course with the Earth. The impending catastrophe provides the backdrop for an anarchic Hobbesian 'war of all against all' as desperate individuals vie for a place in the 'arks' that will set forth for another planet and thus save the human race from extinction.

From mid-1980s, the apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic movie made something of a comeback, typically centred on the threat and aftermath of a global environmental or nuclear apocalypse. Two representative examples are Geoff Murphy's post-apocalyptic love triangle scenario, *The Quiet Earth* (1985), a contemporary remake, set in New Zealand, of a 1950s movie, which dramatically articulated the all-too-palpable fears of a pending nuclear war and its aftermath in the mid-1980s;[5] and Steve de Jarnatt's *Miracle Mile* (1988), a chronicle of the last night on Earth before nuclear war erupts, a scenario in which a wide range of characters respond in very different ways, evincing shock, panic, despair, suicide, denial, maintaining normality, pursuing pleasure and committing heroic acts. Don McKellar's cult film, *Last Night* (1998), a classic 'last night on Earth' scenario, features, for example, a failed suicide pact as the film's central couple decide to embrace and kiss before their (and the world's) definitive destruction. Abel Ferrara's *4:44: Last Day on Earth* (2011) is a contemporary revisiting of this theme, again centred on a central couple, a successful actor [Willem Dafoe] and his artist girlfriend [Shanyn Leigh] in New York City, whose lovemaking after observing the shocked and panic-stricken responses of those around them concludes their intimation of mortality.

In recent years, however, another kind of apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic movie has appeared.[6] These movies tend to thematise more explicitly contemporary anxieties over environmental devastation, geopolitical threats and economic crises, often by way of religious-theological speculation. This is not surprising, given our contemporary ideological-historical mood, which Žižek (2009) recently described as the cultural experience of 'living in the end times'. A good example of this kind of apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic fantasy is Alex Proyas' *Knowing* (2008), a film that stages the destruction of

the Earth and of all life on the planet as a spectacle that certain privileged characters – and viewers – are able to enjoy; an apocalyptic fantasy laced with vaguely metaphysical speculation over free will and determinism, religious themes of prophecy and salvation, and the Darwinian indifference of nature to human suffering. Blockbuster post-apocalyptic movies, such as Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996) and *2012* (2009), take a more practical approach, affirming their faith in the nuclear family, in the American Way, in the United States Government, military technology and macho action heroes, reinvesting (ideological) belief in the world-saving virtues of what Deleuze called the sensory-motor action schema. Their redemptive version of post-apocalyptic renewal typically features enterprising individuals, 'love conquers all' couples, even the American President, as stock characters cast in mythic roles as unexpectedly all-powerful heroes who avert catastrophe and re-found humanity by purifying acts of violence against alien forces, aided by an unstable blend of fringe science and esoteric religious prophecy.[7]

Adam McKay's satirical apocalyptic disaster movie, *Don't Look Up* (2021), which critics have taken as an allegory of climate change inertia, explores a very different but scarily familiar scenario. What if, when faced with the scientifically credible warning of an existential threat, politicians and the public reacted with indifference or denialism? What if politicians treated scientists either as inconvenient truth-tellers who can be demonised or dismissed, or as convenient 'influencers' who might be co-opted into a media narrative designed to gain political advantage? How might public opinion be manipulated in order to block collective action? *Don't Look Up* uses the discovery of a large meteor hurtling towards the Earth (a 'planet-killer', we are told), to explore these questions. It stages a darkly comic but plausible version of how, in our media-saturated, 'post-truth' political world, governments and the public might spectacularly fail to respond to a catastrophic global threat. Although critics have rightly seen the film as a climate change allegory, *Don't Look Up* deals more broadly with the intersection between the media, politics, big business and science activism. It questions the pervasive science scepticism and demonisation of 'expert culture' within our 'post-truth' world. It examines the pernicious nexus between the media, governments, business and populist politics that have created an environment where the circulation of 'fake news', infotainment and political spin neutralises and undermines factual reporting, responsible democratic debate and the possibility of co-ordinated political action.

It will not be surprising to observe that von Trier's *Melancholia* offers a challenge to conventional apocalyptic disaster movies, a determinate negation of popular cinematic apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fantasies. It is a resolutely tragic film that refuses any humanistic consolation or metaphysical comfort afforded by post-apocalyptic redemption fantasies. It eschews any reassuring humanist visions that might reconstitute the couple, the family or civilization as we know it after the 'divine' violence of cosmic catastrophe. What *Melancholia* shares with more arthouse 'end of days' movies, however, is the manner in which the apocalypse – in the biblical sense of a revelation of all secrets, and in the generic sense of a fantasy of world-destruction – is reflected or refracted by a familial drama or melodrama. Michael Haneke's remarkable post-apocalyptic film, *Time of the Wolf* (2003), is noteworthy here, with its 'biopolitical' focus on a mother [Isabelle Huppert] and her two children reduced to the status of 'bare life' (Agamben 1998), struggling to survive as refugees in a makeshift lawless 'camp' following an unspecified social/ecological disaster. Terrence Malick's cosmic epic, *The Tree of Life* (2011), also includes, following the familial melodrama, evolution of life and memory film sequences, Jack's [Sean Penn's] apocalyptic vision of the destruction of the Earth and eschatological vision of redemption through love. Jeff Nichols' *Take Shelter* (2011) is another interesting case, centring on the possibly schizophrenic visions of a character, the breakdown of his family, work and personal life as he obsessively constructs a storm shelter, and concluding with what appears to be the film's confirmation of his apocalyptic visions of preternatural storms, waterspouts and tsunamis.

This fascination with the 'end of the world' topos inflected through familial melodrama is significant for a number of reasons. On the one hand, it reflects culturally pervasive anxieties over a variety of social, cultural, economic, political and environmental concerns (threats to the nuclear family, fragile social and cultural identities, psychological and social dislocation due to globalisation, geopolitical terrorist threats, economic crises, climate change and environmental threats). On the other, we can also read such films allegorically, that is, as reflecting a sense of cultural and political paralysis, scepticism or deadlock. As some critics remark, the 'end of the world' serves as an allegory of the unsustainable character of globalised consumer capitalism, and of our inability to envisage a different world as our own confronts the threat of cascading ecological, economic and geopolitical crises (as Shaviro 2012 claims is the case with *Melancholia*). Whereas some films opt for a fragile, ambiguous political possibility (Haneke's *Time of the*

Wolf), and others for moral-religious forms of transcendence (*The Tree of Life* or *Take Shelter*), von Trier's *Melancholia* refuses any straightforward political, religious or ideological solution. Instead it reworks the neo-romanticist strategy of staging the 'end of the world' as a sublime aesthetic spectacle, one that refuses any form of psychological or moral comfort to be drawn from the devastating thought of world-annihilation. As I discuss below, it does so, moreover, in a highly reflexive manner, staging this aesthetic spectacle of world-sacrifice as a metacinematic reflection on the corruption, and possible redemption, of art (cinema) today.

Romanticism

What does it mean to describe von Trier's *Melancholia* as neo-romanticist? According to early German romantics such as the Schlegel brothers, the romantic work of art is capable of disclosing the nature of being indirectly via aesthetic means. These include the aesthetic use of the fragment, of transcendental irony as a way of combining poetic and philosophical discourse, and the poetic merging of aesthetic figures, rhetorical forms and conceptual reflection (see Sinnerbrink 2012b). Romanticism is dedicated to creating poetic yet philosophical works that achieve what idealism sought but failed to secure: an (indirect) revelation of being (or what the German idealists and romantics alike called 'the Absolute') (see Critchley 2004; Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe 1988). Although often overlooked, the link between cinema and romanticism remains profound. As Rancière remarks (2006: 166), the cinema is an artform whose principle, 'the unity of conscious thought and unconscious perception', was worked out one hundred years before its advent, namely in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1794). With its capacity to combine the mechanical recording of events with the conscious intentionality of the filmmaker, 'cinema, with its unconscious eye… enacts the romantic conception of the work as the identity of an unconscious process and a conscious process' (Rancière 2009: 225).[8] The conscious intentionality of the filmmaker combines with the unconscious capturing of an ambiguous reality, the aesthetic manipulation of the images merging with the tapping of 'unconscious' currents of mood and meaning made manifest via aesthetic and technological means.

Let us consider, in this light, *Melancholia*'s remarkable Prelude, set to the Prelude of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (1859). This is not the first von Trier film to begin with a prelude: *Antichrist* (2009) commences with a striking

series of black and white images, shot using the super slow-motion Phantom HD Gold camera, set to Handel's aria 'Lascia ch'io pianga' from the opera *Rivaldo* (1711).[9] *Dogville* (2003) commenced with an overture set to Pergolesi's Stabat Mater, and von Trier's early film *Epidemic* (1987) – his viral contagion meets metacinematic scriptwriter drama – featured the Prelude to Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. Even *Breaking the Waves* featured *tableaux vivants* in the 'intertitle' sections introducing the various chapters of the movie, set to evocative popular songs of the period (by David Bowie, Procul Harum and Jethro Tull, for example).

Melancholia's remarkable Overture consists of 16 colour slow-motion shots, slowed to near stasis, creating an uncanny *tableaux vivant* effect, accompanied by Wagner's *Vorspiel* to *Tristan and Isolde* (1859). The opening image is a close shot of a woman's face [Kirsten Dunst], her head slightly to the left of mid-screen, opening her eyes and gazing directly at the camera, her face pale, tired, blank. A moment later dead birds fall from the sky behind her, an apocalyptic sign in many mythologies of God's disapproval of the conduct of humankind. The second image depicts a symmetrically arranged front lawn, flanked by rows of trees, with a large sundial magnified in the foreground (reminiscent of Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1966)). In the background a tiny figure can be seen swinging a child around, like a tiny clock movement. Also striking are the dual shadows that the trees and other objects cast on the ground, anticipating the revelation of the planet Melancholia, its soft blue light rivalling the sun and the moon.

The third shot is of a painting, Pieter Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow* (1565), showing a weary band of hunters and their dogs, cresting a hill and about to trudge home to their village, dormant in a small valley under a grey winter sky. Ashes appear in the front of the image, falling gently like snow, or like the dead birds, as the image slowly turns to flame. Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow* also features prominently in Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and in *Mirror* (1975). Von Trier's homage is thus twofold: to Brueghel's early modern depiction of the mood of melancholia and the spiritual vacuity of crass materialism (later we see Justine's advertising image of sprawling models, modelled on another Brueghel painting, *The Land of Cockaigne* (1567)); and to Tarkovsky's art cinema of the 1970s, to moving images now sacrificed, reduced to ash, a cinematic world consumed in the transition to post-classical digital imagery. The Prelude cuts to a cosmic image of an enormous blue planet slowly wending its way around a red or orange star. This image (and a later one) rhymes with the opening shot of Justine's head and face, thus drawing the visual parallel between the melancholic

Justine and the planet Melancholia, a cosmic pre-figuration of the mood of impending doom and disaster.

The next shot is an oneiric portrait of Justine's sister, Claire [Charlotte Gainsbourg], clutching her son, and trying to make her way across the golf course, her boots sinking into the grassy ground. The image features a suspicious flag, the nineteenth hole, which refers, von Trier remarks, to limbo (theologically, the 'border zone' between heaven and hell inhabited by lost souls).[10] This is followed by an image of a black horse, Justine's beloved Abraham (recalling the many horses in Tarkovsky's films but also reversing Muybridge's classic study of animal motion), falling to the ground beneath a night sky glowing with northern lights. This is followed by an image of Justine standing in the golf course, arms outstretched like Christ, as moths dance around her (perhaps a biblical reference to a passage in Isaiah, referring to moths and mortality in the face of God's infinite power).[11]

A striking *tableau vivant* follows, one of the signature shots in the film. We see the gloomy castle at twilight, with the bride Justine, young Leo and Claire, arrayed symmetrically on the lawn, barely moving, flanked by rows of trees. Twin sources of nocturnal light, Melancholia's *blaues Licht* (blue light) and the moon's eerie glow, lend the scene a strongly romantic cast, reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich. This cuts to another image of the planets in their *danse macabre*, the planet Melancholia, dwarfing the Earth, performing its teasing fly-by, followed by a shot of Justine, her hands slowly rising, electricity sparking from her fingertips and from the light poles behind her. The interaction between the planets, their mutual attraction, transfigures both nature and culture, transforming the manicured golf course into an elemental cauldron of energy, and Justine into a lightning rod for the catastrophic collision to come.

The images in this Prelude, however, are not arranged chronologically, tracking the movement of the narrative. They cross back and forth, rather, between different temporal frameworks of the film, from the narrative time of Justine's disastrous wedding reception, the psychological or subjective time of the characters' anxious wait for the impending catastrophe, to the cosmic time that frames the final collision between the Earth and Melancholia. An image evoking the first part of the film appears, one that captures the oppressive feeling of time slowing and one's physical energy ebbing; a nightmarish but beautiful vision of Justine in her wedding dress, striding against skeins of black, weed-like strands, wrapped around her limbs and holding her back, but also unfurling from the trees, as though

nature itself were refusing to let her go. Another shot of the planets Earth and Melancholia appears, looming larger this time, the parallel now explicit between Justine's psychological state, her physical distress, a generalised *Weltschmerz* and the cosmic cataclysm to come. A shot from inside one of the melancholy rooms in the castle, a Baronial style interior framed by archways and intricate window-frames, reveals a burning bush in the garden outside, another image combining a biblical reference with an elemental, Tarkovsky-like evocation of fire. We then cut to a romantic image of the drowning bride clutching her wedding bouquet, half-immersed in a watery pond, slowly sinking amidst the lily pads and wavering weeds, reminiscent of John Everett Millais' pre-Raphaelite homage, *Ophelia* (1852).

The oneiric vision flashes forward to Justine and Leo in the forest, Justine approaching from a distance, Leo whittling a stick he will offer for Justine's 'magic cave' that the surviving trio will build for their final moments together. What becomes clearer with hindsight is that these are prophetic images of events still to come (Justine, seated on a stone wall will watch Claire return carrying her son during a hailstorm; Justine's horse Abraham that will fall to the ground rather than cross the bridge to the village; Leo whittling sticks in the forest in preparation for the final collision between Melancholia and the Earth). This vision of world-destruction weighs heavily upon Justine and is perhaps the deeper reason for her profound melancholia, the lost object here being not only her own life (her marriage, career and family) but sheer attachment to the world itself. Leo looks up from whittling wood and gazes off into the distance, just as the image cuts to a long shot of Melancholia approaching the Earth; the Prelude now swelling to its climax, the image suggests a perverse cosmic embrace as Melancholia pulls the Earth into itself, a *Liebestod* to end all others. As the image fades to black the Prelude ends with a primordial rumbling that persists beyond the void, accompanying the painted screen title: 'Lars von Trier *Melancholia*'.

A Cognitivist Interlude

What are we to make of this remarkable neo-romanticist vision of sublime world-destruction? Although there are many sophisticated interpretations of the film, Torben Grodal (2012) has published one of the few unabashedly cognitivist analyses of *Melancholia* (see Sinnerbrink 2016b). According to Grodal (2009), art cinema films, such as those of von Trier, generate their aesthetic effects by blocking the ordinary processes of cognition, what he

calls the 'PECMA flow': the circuit linking perception, emotion, cognition and motor action. Interestingly, Grodal's cognitivist approach parallels, in striking fashion, Deleuze's analyses of the breakdown of the sensory-motor action schema that defines the post-war emergence of time-image cinema (1986: 197–215). According to both Grodal and Deleuze, most narrative film follows a conventional 'sensory-motor' circuit: perception elicits affective/emotional responses linked with cognition that are expressed in actions (in non-spectatorial contexts). Classical narrative film emulates the PECMA flow via the devices of continuity editing, character-driven action and narrative closure (what Deleuze calls the 'sensory-motor schema' defining classical 'movement-image' cinema) (1986: 155–159). Art cinema, by contrast, blocks or impedes the PECMA flow: motor action is interrupted, which generates dissociated perception, 'saturated' affects or emotions, and open-ended reflection oriented towards the search for 'higher order' meanings. This account accords well with Deleuze's analysis of the effects of the breakdown of the sensory-motor action schema, which, in like fashion, interrupts the circuit between perception and action, thus realising varieties of affect, thought and temporal experience (expressed in time-images) ordinarily subordinated in 'movement-image' cinema. Deleuze's concern, however, is not with the affective-cognitive processes involved in our response to art cinema with its emphatic use of time-images; rather, it is to articulate an alternative semiotic typology of image-signs corresponding to different modalities of cinematic expression. Von Trier's films are replete with such time-images, which open up aesthetic experiences – of affect, memory and time – that resist explicit discursive articulation, and thus chime with the tradition of romanticist theories of art indebted to Kant's (romantic) account of aesthetic ideas (1987 [1789]: 215–217) – indeterminate but aesthetically rich ideas that invite open-ended interpretation – as elaborated in the *Critique of Judgment*.

Grodal (2012) analyses the 'prologues' to von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009) and *Melancholia* (2011) from a cognitivist point of view that, nonetheless, resonates with aspects of Deleuze's account of the 'pure optical and sound situations' defining time-image cinema (1989: 13–24). Both films commence with super slow-motion sequences using arresting visual imagery (black-and-white and colour respectively) and affectively charged music (Handel's 'Lascia ch'io pianga' and Wagner's Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*). They both block action, principally through ultra slow-motion imagery, suggesting but also thwarting narrative and symbolic meaning, thus evoking saturated affect, 'global' (rather than personalised) emotions and what Grodal calls the

quest for 'higher-order meanings'. In both Preludes, moreover, the play between movement and stasis both stimulates and checks strong emotions such as panic and anxiety, emotions that Grodal (2012: 49 ff.) attributes to von Trier as creative but tormented cinematic auteur who uses these aesthetic strategies in the service of his cinematic art.

The forward thrust and affective charge of the romantic music, Grodal notes (2012: 48), is checked by the arresting of movement in the images, resulting in a simultaneous intensification of perception, affect and reflection.[12] In this regard, for Grodal (2012: 48), the Preludes reflect four general strategies evident in von Trier's films for coping with strong or destructive emotions, particularly anxiety and panic: aesthetic stylisation and containment (or what we might otherwise call sublimation) through beauty or poeticism; sublime submission to a powerful force or higher order of meaning; manipulating the reality status of the image; and obsessive control of the image's aesthetic elements. Shifting between the film's aesthetic style and von Trier's own famously troubled psychology, Grodal concludes that the Overture of *Melancholia*, like that of *Antichrist*, is a way of controlling the disturbing emotions of panic and separation anxiety, solicited and managed within a highly controlled aesthetic construction. The pointed use and display of romanticist imagery, for example, both by von Trier in the Wagnerian Overture and by Justine in her angry outburst in the library, serves to both express and allay anxiety and panic by way of aesthetic containment. Using beautiful imagery in a highly controlled and manipulated manner is a way to defuse anxiety, to sublimate panic and to solicit reflection in the service of an ambiguous 'submission' to higher orders of meaning. As Grodal remarks, alluding to the aesthetic experience of cinematic sublimity:

> Trier's use of romantic imagery is an effort to produce humility and also a way of inscribing the prologues in an art film tradition that often caters to a quasi-religious submission to higher meanings.
>
> 2012: 50

In addition to the strategy of submission to sublime meaning, the images not only arrest movement but drain colour from the image and stylise the composition of the frame through arresting, unusual or striking elements disrupting balance, symmetry, formal expectations and visual conventions. The result is a manipulation of the reality status of these images, which occupy an ambiguous position somewhere between dream and fantasy, art historical allusion and melancholy reverie. Even the otherwise terrifying images of the Earth being dwarfed by the planet Melancholia are rendered

as arresting and beautiful. They are accompanied by the romantic Wagner Overture, defusing the sense of panic or anxiety such images might otherwise induce and replacing these with a 'derealised' aestheticised image suggesting sublimity or other symbolic meanings. The entire sequence, moreover, amply displays von Trier's own 'obsessive control' over the aesthetic elements of image, with its self-consciously stylised composition, pictorial and cinematic allusions, complex aesthetic problem-solving approach, ambiguous reality status and indeterminate connotative meanings spanning narrative, poetic and symbolic dimensions.

Indeed, like other von Trier films, *Melancholia* works with self-imposed rules generating a complex series of artistic experiments grounded in the imposition of rules and elaboration of games expressing what a number of theorists have described as 'creativity under constraint' (see Elsaesser 2015, 2019; Hjort 2008).[13] Acknowledging but also subverting a European tradition of art cinema and pictorial representation, von Trier's aesthetic game-playing involves a complex series of aesthetic strategies designed to both intensify and dissipate the emotions of anxiety and panic, providing an aesthetic transformation of these emotions in a manner that sublimates their negative affective valency towards poetic experience and symbolic meaning. Taken together, Grodal's cognitivist analysis offers an enlightening 'naturalistic' account of the underlying perceptual-affective-cognitive processes at play and artfully manipulated by von Trier's distinctive audio-visual sequences in films like *Melancholia* and *Antichrist*.

Interestingly, Grodal's analysis not only accounts for some of the underlying affective and cognitive processes involved in our aesthetic response to the von Trier Overtures; it also recalls, ironically, psychoanalytic film theories that applied a similar diagnostic to the analysis of cinematic images (sublimation, fetishism, fantasy projection) and to film auteurs (Hitchcock's alleged voyeurism, perversity and misogyny, for example). Grodal too tends towards a 'pathologisation' of von Trier's aesthetic of romantic sublimity, suggesting that the film evinces von Trier's own obsessive-compulsive tendencies, using art as a way of coping with his much-publicised depression (2012: 51).[14] Unfortunately, however, Grodal's cognitivist-auteurist analysis says almost nothing about the very mood, aesthetic sensibility or emotional condition one would expect to be addressed in analysing such a film: *melancholia*. How do these aesthetic strategies, and more particularly the evocation of a specific mood, express and evoke a state of melancholia that carries subjective, aesthetic and metaphysical connotations? What is specific about the evocation and exploration of

melancholia as both affective-psychological and aesthetic-metaphysical state? Grodal's analysis also refrains from addressing the film's broader cultural and ideological significance. It does not address the film's allegorisation of Justine's experience of melancholia to capture the apocalyptic cultural-historical mood of the present; to critique the vacuity of a naïve rationalist optimism in the face of the contemporary 'crisis of world' reflecting twinned ecological and globalised threats; and to explore the putative 'end of film' within a neo-romantic aesthetic of cinematic sublimity. In what follows I shall address these questions with respect to the concept of cinematic moods, and explore both psychological-aesthetic and ethico-cultural dimensions of the film's presentation and exploration of melancholia.

Melancholia

There is no doubt that one of the most impressive features of the film is its remarkable presentation of the experience of melancholia. For all the brilliance of Kirsten Dunst's performance, however, it would be a misleading to interpret the film solely as a psychological study of depression. Rather, melancholia is evoked in the film as a mood, an aesthetic sensibility, a way of experiencing time; a visionary condition and aesthetic experience of revelatory temporality that contemporary cinema has all but forgotten. Chiming with Kristeva's (1989) remarkable meditation on depression and melancholia, von Trier attempts to reclaim the romantic association of melancholia with prophetic vision and artistic genius (hence the references to Brueghel, Wagner and Tarkovsky). It not only explores the subjective experience of this distinctive mood or state of mind, it evokes melancholia as an aesthetic, historically resonant mood expressing contemporary cultural-historical anxieties, while also commenting on the corruption and possible redemption of cinema in the digital age.

That Justine is both a melancholic and an advertiser, for example, should give us pause. She has a refined aesthetic sensibility, 'knows things', but cannot cope with the everyday world of work, refusing to give her boorish boss, Jack [Stellan Skarsgård], the 'tagline' he so desires (on her wedding night no less, a signal that commerce really controls art). Still, Justine eventually gives him an acerbic (and rather Heideggerian) tagline – '*Nothing*, just Nothing' – one that best describes what Jack stands for (the nihilistic corruption of art through advertising). Jack is the embodiment of a relentless drive to work, universal commodification, an expression of the new spirit of

capitalism, a destructive force bent on annihilating anything that stands in the way of business. It is this world that Justine sacrifices, renouncing her promotion (as 'artistic director'), insulting her boss, losing her job, thus negating the entire sphere of her social and professional identity, everything binding her to the empty world of wealth, work and advertising with its nihilistic corruption of aesthetic experience.

One way of reading this episode is to treat it as von Trier declaring his conflicted persona as director: encompassing Justine, melancholic artist/advertiser ('artistic director'), and Claire, caring sister and anxious organiser trying to oversee the event (the wedding ritual or wedding movie cum metaphysical disaster movie). If Justine and Claire are contrasting aspects of von Trier's directorial persona, we could take the film's presentation of melancholia as an allegory of the corruption of cinema as art; a self-critique of von Trier's own ambivalent role as melancholic artist, anxious controller and cynical manipulator of images – a loss resulting in a melancholic act of (cinematic) world-destruction.

At the same time, *Melancholia* reinvents the possibilities of art cinema in a commercial-digital age by channelling modernist cinematic masters, while fusing genre cinema with hybrid forms (domestic melodrama meets metaphysical disaster movie). In an important scene, Justine, having withdrawn from her own wedding celebration, reacts violently to the pictures of modernist art in the books on display in the library, replacing them with pre-modern and romantic images (Brueghel, Millais and so on); as though her melancholia were itself a symptom of the decadence of modernist optimism, its corruption into contemporary advertising design. There is something rotten, for Justine, at the heart of modernism and its degeneration into consumer culture, just as there is something rotten in the humanist myth of progress, our rationalist faith in redemption from catastrophe through science and technology. Indeed, Justine's gesture of refusal and negation signals that these ideas – the corruption of modernist art by advertising, and the need to retrieve romanticism as an antidote to the myth of progress – prefigures the destruction of the image-world that is soon to come (recalling the image of Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow* being consumed by flame and turning to ash).

What is it that defines Justine's and indeed the film's melancholia? According to Freud (1917: 237–258), melancholia is a pathological condition resulting from the inability to 'work through' the loss of a loved object through the normal processes of mourning that would allow the subject to detach herself from it. In mourning, the subject's basic capacity for affective

engagement with the world remains intact. In melancholia, the loss is so catastrophic that the subject negates its own self and withdraws herself from the world. It involves a negation of the self so radical that it leads to a complete negation of social reality as such. In *Melancholia* (the film), Justine's negation of self and failure to participate in the rituals of everyday life – like her own wedding reception – leaves her bereft of the capacity for affective engagement and meaningful social agency. She strives to play the smiling bride, but like the oversize limousine that gets stuck on the way to her wedding reception, she no longer fits the social milieu in which she now exists: the social rituals strike her as empty, trivial and absurd. In the course of the evening, she withdraws from the wedding reception, withdraws from her husband, rejects the demands of her boss, loses her career, seduces an underling and prompts her husband to leave her, is abandoned by her family and falls into a deep depression that leaves her unable to speak or to move. The next day she can barely make it out of bed and into a taxi, let alone walk or talk. She spends her days sleeping. When finally roused out of bed by the promise of her favourite dish (meatloaf) and half-carried to the table by her sister and professional assistant 'Little Father', Justine can barely swallow a mouthful of the meal before beginning to weep, declaring that her food 'tastes like ashes'.

This melancholia, however, is not only confined to Justine's crippling depression but pervades the entire world of the film. Melancholia is a mood that imbues the world with a distinctive sensibility, congealing the present, negating the comportment defining everyday activity, thus revealing the emptiness of our everyday busy-ness (not to mention business) as well as opening up an uncanny, 'prophetic' dimension of temporal experience. Justine's self-negation extends from her family and work to her investment in the world itself. It is thus with a sense of relief that she learns of the impending collision of Melancholia with the Earth. Her sister Claire becomes increasingly anxious and frightened about what is to come, while her husband, initially reassuring, clings to his faith in reason and science, only to fall into despair once he realises that the collision is inevitable, that his faith in scientific mastery and rational control was misplaced. He commits suicide rather than face his family and the humiliating certainty of their deaths, not to mention the collapse of the rationally optimistic worldview to which he clings. Shattering our myths of progress, von Trier seems to suggest, could well lead to a cultural nihilism, a collective depression, if not societal self-destruction. Justine, by contrast, slowly emerges from her depression, gains a quiet strength and becomes almost calm and contemplative. Seduced by

the presence of the vast planet, she bathes nude in its eerie blue light, beguiled by its growing presence as it hurtles towards the Earth, pulling our planet into its fatal embrace. Justine's melancholia takes on cosmic dimensions, her negation of self and world enveloping the world itself. Her melancholia thus achieves its end, just as the planet Melancholia destroys the Earth, along with Justine, Claire and Leo in their 'magic cave', and just as the film *Melancholia* annihilates the image-world it had so beautifully composed for us.

Melancholy Moods: *Melancholia*'s Cinematic Ethics

It is clear already from its Overture that *Melancholia* is a film concerned with the evocation of mood. Although it deals with the psychological aspect of mood (melancholia), it is also concerned with its aesthetic aspect, taken as an expression of aesthetic sensibility, a way of disclosing or revealing the world and time – an aesthetic experience of movies that is usually overlooked in favour of movement and action. As distinct from the clinical notion of depression, the film explores, in an evocative fashion, the existential kinship between melancholia and artistic creativity, the kind of mood conducive to aesthetically mediated ways of knowing. As Justine says, 'I know things', alluding not only to her capacity for intuitive knowledge, as linked to her melancholic disposition, but to her knowledge of the inevitability of the planet Melancholia's destruction of the Earth. As I shall suggest, moreover, one of the most striking aspects of *Melancholia*'s aesthetics of mood concerns the manner in which it also evokes an ethical sensibility or acknowledgment of the fragility, vulnerability and irreplaceability of life on our planet. How are these aesthetic and ethical aspects of mood related in the film?

One obvious way is via *Melancholia*'s powerful evocation of the mood of melancholy, both as communicating Justine's own experience of profound depression and as an expressive aesthetic feature of the film's cinematic world. Here it is important to distinguish between moods attributed to a character perspective and moods expressed by the work of art itself. Indeed, a common conflation that occurs in discussions of mood concerns the difference between a subjectively experienced mood elicited by a work, and the aesthetic mood expressed by the work. Plantinga (2012) has usefully elaborated this distinction between human moods (experienced by a subject) and art moods (the pervasive affective tone, atmosphere or

attunement conveyed by a work), what I have elsewhere discussed, drawing on early film theorists, as the *Stimmung* of a cinematic work (Sinnerbrink 2012a). As Plantinga (2012) notes, the mood of a work is distinct from the mood of the spectator, even though the work's mood – expressing, for example, the perspective of the film's narration, of a narrator, or a character – usually aims to elicit certain moods from its audience. I can recognise the mood of gloomy dread or acute anxiety expressed by a horror film without actually experiencing that mood myself while watching the film; or I can be experiencing a certain mood that does not necessarily correspond with that expressed or communicated by the film (a nostalgic mood while watching an old slapstick comedy, for example). In sum, mood primes or orients us emotionally (and cognitively) towards perceiving or attending to certain elements, emphases or aspects of a film-world, preparing us for an appropriate engagement with the emotional modulations and dynamics that unfold over the course of the narrative.

The two parts of *Melancholia*, for example, are designed to express and evoke different moods. The warmly lit, animated hand-held camera of Part I (Justine) conveys the conviviality and attempted merriment of the wedding (which soon turns sour as familial tensions surface, Justine's Boss harasses her for his 'tagline' and Justine slides into depression). The 'cooler', darker, more subdued mood of Part II (Claire), by contrast, with its colour-coded costuming, less animated camera work, and subdued lighting (initially more naturalistic, more monochromatic and less vibrant), also features blue-filtered light that starts to pervade later scenes, reflecting both the planet Melancholia's ominous presence and Justine's own state of mind. All of these features give the second half of the film a darker, unsettling, melancholy atmosphere. The final part of the film, which centres on the inevitability of the devastating destruction of the Earth by the planet Melancholia, collapses the distinction between the mood of melancholia attributable to Justine and the mood of melancholia expressed by the film. By the film's extraordinary final sequence, Justine's mood has itself been alleviated, as she manifests a Stoic calm or existential resoluteness in the face of impending disaster. Her 'subjective' state of melancholia now pervades the film's cinematic world (the blue light bathing each scene, the rumbling sound of the approaching planet and the recurrence of the *Tristan and Isolde* overture lending the final sequence a tragic-romantic atmosphere of life and death entwined).

Mood, however, is not only an aesthetic dimension of cinematic worlds and the experience of spectator involvement in such worlds. It plays a significant role in what I have called 'cinematic ethics': cinema's potential as

a medium of ethical experience. By this I mean films that use the aesthetic power of cinema to elicit ethical experience, or to draw our attention towards phenomena and perspectives that we might otherwise overlook or undervalue, inviting affective-cognitive forms of engagement directed towards new forms of perception, the exercise of moral imagination or alternative ways of thinking. Cinematic ethics, from this point of view, expresses cinema's power to evoke an ethical experience that can prompt aesthetic, moral-psychological, even cultural transformation; the aesthetic 'conversion' of our feelings and perceptions, attitudes and orientations – the transformation of our ways of apprehending the world (see Sinnerbrink 2016a: 3–24).

There are three primary but related ways in which mood can evoke ethical experience in film (see also Plantinga 2012). The first is the 'subjective-phenomenological' aspect of mood (showing what something is like, how it feels to experience X, presenting a distinctive experiential perspective on Y), which typically unfolds as part of a dramatic narrative scenario expressing either the perspective of a character or the worldview articulated by a film. The second is the 'moral-psychological' aspect of mood (how it affects our moral sympathies and antipathies again towards characters, situations, ideas or worldviews, how it affects or orients moral judgments, how it exercises or stymies moral imagination, potentially shifts ethical attitudes and moral convictions, even alters our disposition towards action). The third is the 'ontological-aesthetic' dimension of mood (how it contributes to the composition of a meaningful cinematic world, draws our attention to certain features of the world, makes things salient, affectively charged or matter to us). This third dimension of mood generally remains at a remove from narrative representation since it pertains to the expression or disclosure of a cinematic world rather than to the elaboration of its narrative content.

To say a few words about the first aspect, mood not only orients us within a cinematic world, it can open up a space (and time) of engagement in which we can experience phenomenologically the subjective (or 'what it is like') dimension of a certain experience, say of grief, loss or depression. Here mood works most closely with the elicitation of emotion, operating in the ways that provide an affectively rich means of orienting us towards certain kinds of cognitive or emotional responses. As many commentators have noted, one virtue of *Melancholia* is its impressively authentic depiction of depression, rendering powerfully and vividly the 'what it is like' aspect of this subjectively debilitating form of experience (see Read 2014; Shaviro 2012). Justine's attempts to maintain a facade of cheerful involvement, her increasing

inability to see the relevance or significance of the rituals she is performing, her inexorable slide into a state of detached indifference, followed by bodily inertia and utter affective disengagement – all of these aspects of her experience are rendered in detail, thanks to Kirsten Dunst's remarkable performance. The scenes showing Justine's inability to catch a taxi despite her sister's encouragements, her complete lack of energy and inability to enter the bathtub and her failed attempt to enjoy a family meal, rejecting her favourite dish as tasting 'like ashes', all highlight the experiential difficulties of suffering depression. As remarked, the mood of the transitional sequences between the end of Part I and beginning of Part II also underline the subjective sense of a world that has lost its colour, texture, flavour and vitality. The lighting and colour scheme retreat to dark and drab tones, gloomy interior and exterior shots, ordinary ambient sound being dispersed by an ominous background rumble, with the increasingly pervasive blue of the planet Melancholia paralleling Justine's affective, bodily and 'existential' sense of melancholia.

The second aspect (the moral-psychological dimension of mood) is the primary focus of discussions of the role of mood, affect and emotion (e.g. empathy and sympathy) in rhetorically 'moving' viewers towards changes in their moral attitudes, the exercise of moral imagination or the slanting of our stances towards ideological worldviews. This is the aspect of mood most relevant to recent discussions of affective engagement with cinema, notably the focus on affect, empathy or sympathy, and the manner in which emotional alignment and moral allegiance are generated through cinematic means (see Sinnerbrink 2016a: 87–95). This is the aspect that Plantinga (2009a) foregrounds as having significant potential to understand and explain the moral rhetoric of cinema and how it can persuade us towards certain social attitudes or ideological convictions. *Melancholia*'s sympathetic presentation of how Justine's melancholy character develops in strength and resoluteness as the fatal planetary collision becomes inevitable, comforting her practical sister Claire who becomes terrified and panicked, is a powerful example of how mood can elicit sympathy or empathy in affective terms. As (in part) a familial/domestic melodrama, focusing on the complex relationship between the two sisters, *Melancholia* takes great care to present the sisters in a sympathetic manner. The film focalises the narrative, in Part I, around Justine's failed attempts to successfully engage in her own wedding celebrations. In Part II, it shifts focus towards Claire's well-meaning but failed attempts to care for her sister during a depressive bout, while becoming more frightened and anxious as the inevitability of the looming planetary

collision becomes apparent. Claire's husband John [Kiefer Sutherland], a bourgeois proprietor (owner of the manor house establishment with its 18-hole golf course) as well as a rationalist optimist, has a dogmatically rationalist faith in science that proves hollow, choosing suicide rather than face the reality of world-destruction. Justine's calm acceptance of their fate, and blunt rejection of Claire's misguided attempts to mask the reality of the catastrophe via a pleasant dinner engagement over a glass of wine, culminate in the film's concluding sequence. Justine reminds young Leo about the 'magic cave' they need to build that will keep them from harm, a fragile make-believe construction (like a tent or tepee) in which Justine comforts distraught Claire and frightened Leo during their final moments on Earth.[15]

There is also a third ethical dimension of mood – more aesthetic, ontological and existential – that contributes to how a cinematic world is composed and communicated. This aspect of mood refers to how a cinematic world is presented holistically with particular elements foregrounded as affectively charged or emotionally salient: moods that can reveal a world as meaningful, and that can dispose the viewer to notice, attend to or be moved by the sheer existence of this world. The manner in which Terrence Malick's films, for example, compose a cinematic world presenting the majestic indifference of nature, the contingency of human identity, the presence of transcendent beauty and revelatory moments of moral grace, the metaphysical-ethical as well as romantic-sensual experience of love, are all dependent on the expression of mood as a constitutive element of the composition and aesthetic disclosure of a cinematic world (see Sinnerbrink 2019d). Making something beautiful, arresting or memorable makes it meaningful, shaping how much we care about and thus how we habitually respond to the world. Mood can make the world – including salient elements and aspects of it – matter to us in ways that might ordinarily remain 'backgrounded' in favour of cognitively driven instrumental relationships with things and others. The selection of elements and manner of composition of a cinematic world thus takes on implicit ethical significance as shaping and orienting our responses to narrative film.

This aspect of the mood of *Melancholia* is, I suggest, what prompted a number of critics to interpret the film as having an ethical dimension pertaining to the threat of ecological and environment destruction figured through the 'unthinkable' scenario of world destruction. We might consider here Rupert Read's (2014) therapeutic, personal-philosophical interpretation of the film as an existential experiment in traversing mortality in order to affirm existence in an immanent manner. Drawing on Wittgenstein's

conception of a therapeutic philosophy, Read elaborates his reading of the film as inducting viewers upon an experientially rich learning arc that traverses Justine's path from melancholy depression to authentic life-affirmation in the face of mortality, finitude and the threat of world-annihilation. Read emphasises, moreover, the profoundly rich depiction of melancholia (or depression), emphasising both its realism and plausibility; but he also acknowledges and passionately defends the ethical-allegorical dimension of the film as depicting the cultural-societal state of denial that many Western societies display in the face of catastrophic, world-threatening, environmental danger (catastrophic climate change that threatens future generations).

This stands in sharp contrast to Steven Shaviro's (2012) reading of the romanticist elements of *Melancholia* as evoking an anti-capitalist critique of the 'closed' world of Western wealth, power and privilege (emphasising the viewer's pleasure in seeing the film's presentation of the affluent but isolated world of the 'One Percent' being utterly destroyed). Shaviro's claim is based on the idea of a parallel between apocalyptic 'end of the world' scenarios and the 'end of capitalism' as something that remains beyond our cognitive-imaginative frameworks. Such a catastrophic 'loss of world' can only be evoked indirectly, or allegorically, as evident, for example, in apocalyptic disaster movies such as *Melancholia* (and presumably numerous others), signalling that the 'One Percent's' refusal to forego their wealth and conspicuous consumption can only end in the utter destruction of our world.[16]

Although sympathetic to Shaviro's claims concerning the film's critical stance towards the 'One Percent', Read examines more closely the relationship between Justine's depression, Claire's ineffectual attempts to respond to the imminent catastrophe and the film's ethical dimension as enacting an experiential shift in viewers that traverses depression, the thought of world-destruction, but also guides us towards an ethos of life-affirmation. Indeed, for Read, the film's ethical significance ought to be recognised more widely: its exploration of how an acceptance of finitude opens up an existential authenticity, an implicit demand to take responsibility for our collective future (or otherwise) on this fragile, threatened planet. In this respect, Read offers a persuasive interpretation of *Melancholia*, one that captures important aesthetic and dramatic elements of the film, not only as a study in melancholia and existential authenticity, but as an exercise in environmental ethics and eco-aesthetics with a subtle political orientation. We might gloss this as the fragile possibility of a 'community to come' (Agamben) figured in the film's

devastating final image of Justine, Claire and young Leo comforting one another in their makeshift tepee as the planet Melancholia hurtles into the Earth, annihilating everything in its path.

What is striking in this 'ecological' reading of the film, moreover, is the manner in which the cinematic mood of existential care for a world under threat of extinction imbues this metaphysical disaster movie cum domestic melodrama with an ethical urgency and moral power. The sublime images of a carefully ordered world under threat, the romantic-melancholy evocation of nature and the fragility of human life, and the psychologically and affectively moving depiction of the two sisters striving to cope with the threat of world-destruction all contribute to a profound sense of concern over the finitude of life on this planet, threatened by destruction thanks to forces beyond our control. It is in this sense that Žižek (2012a) described *Melancholia* as staging the thought of 'world-sacrifice' as an aesthetic spectacle, one that 'traverses the fantasy' of world-destruction but without the reassuring narrative perspective of a vantage point from which we might contemplate our own demise.[17]

All three ethical dimensions of mood work throughout von Trier's *Melancholia*: the subjective phenomenological experience of 'what it is like' to experience depression; the moral-psychological aspect of soliciting sympathy/empathy for Justine's perspective and experience as a melancholic (and that of her sister, Claire, a 'normal' individual shown trying to cope with the reality of imminent death); and the existential-ontological dimension of mood as showing how life itself on the planet is fragile, flawed and finite. Despite von Trier's reputation as a cynical manipulator and the film's critics describing it as a stylised exercise in nihilism, *Melancholia* reveals, on the contrary, the profoundly ethical dimensions of our aesthetic experience of cinematic moods.[18]

Epilogue

I have suggested that *Melancholia*'s staging of the act of world-destruction is also one of (cinematic) world-sacrifice: von Trier's destruction of an 'evil' world of corrupted or enervated images in order that a new one may emerge; a world of images born of spirit and born again (as Hegel remarks in his *Aesthetics*) from its pulverised ashes (Hegel 1975: 2). The 'end of the world' thus becomes an apocalyptic spectacle staged as an aesthetic phenomenon; a sublime tragedy viewed from an 'impossible' perspective – the 'magic cave'

of cinema itself. One could imagine Justine's ironic tagline for the film: *fiat cinema, pereat mundus*.

At this point, a harsh critic might object: this is precisely what makes *Melancholia* an exercise in empty nihilism; worse still, it shows that von Trier is not only a pretentious neo-romantic but a misguided proto-fascist. Walter Benjamin's famous words (from the conclusion of the 'Work of Art' essay) could even be cited as evidence:

> '*Fiat ars – pereat mundus*', says Fascism, expecting from war, as Marinetti admits, the artistic gratification of a sense perception altered by technology. This is evidently the consummation of *l'art pour l'art*. Humankind, which once, in Homer, was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, has now become one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own destruction as a supreme aesthetic pleasure.
>
> Benjamin 2002: 122

To be clear, we should note that Benjamin was talking about the Futurists and the fascist aestheticising of politics, to which he opposed the communist politicising of art. It would be misleading, moreover, to graft Benjamin's historically specific critique directly onto our contemporary (post-fascist and post-communist) historical-cultural situation. Nonetheless, there are critics who would link von Trier's fascination with romanticism, his scepticism about utopian politics and his confused relationship with Nazism and Judaism with a nihilistic aestheticising of violence – like Justine, von Trier too appears to be 'longing for shipwrecks and sudden death', to quote, as he does, Danish poet Tom Kristensen.[19]

Such a reading, however, would be mistaken, for a number of reasons. It forgets that this this is a film about the end of film, about the end of modernism in film, about the destruction of the image-world and the possibility of a new one. It forgets, in a word, the 'magic cave' that is cinema. It projects a literal meaning onto the film and thus remains blind to *Melancholia*'s mode of aesthetic presentation. It demands moral-political certainty in art, and thereby ignores the sceptical questioning of the present and future that defines contemporary aesthetics as much as our melancholy modernity. As Žižek remarks (2012a), *Melancholia* is, from a dialectical point of view, a profoundly *optimistic* film: one that 'traverses the fantasy' of world-destruction to its end, evoking a shattering spiritual-existential acceptance of our finitude; an experience necessary for the transformation and strengthening of our ethical attitude towards a world under threat of catastrophic destruction. Although the film resonates with contemporary

'apocalyptic' themes, there is no didactic political message within it. Rather, we find within it an ironic critique of a destructive rationalist optimism: the conviction that, given our irrational faith in the myth of progress, and destructive fantasies of controlling nature through technology, the only foreseeable end is a scenario of world-destruction. At the same time, it resonates with contemporary ecological anxieties concerning the threat of world-destruction, even the 'unthinkable' thought of species extinction. *Melancholia* is a film that makes the destruction of the Earth thinkable, sensible, imaginable, as an aesthetic spectacle; and it does so as an ethical challenge to a world that refuses to face this threat, one that repeatedly reverts instead to distracted dismissal or melancholy denial. As Bruno Latour remarks:

> In the amazing final scene of a most amazing film the hyper-rational people fall back onto what old primitive rituals are supposed to do – protecting childish minds against the impact of reality. Von Trier might have grasped just what happens after the sublime has disappeared. Did you think Doomsday would bring the dead to life? Not at all. When the trumpets of judgment resonate in your ear, you fall into melancholia! No new ritual will save you. Let's just sit in a magic hut, and keep denying, denying, denying, until the bitter end.
>
> Latour 2011

Melancholia offers us a tragic insight, an ethical experience of sublimity, of the finitude and fragility of our shared world horizons, which are bounded the fragility of our shared planet. At the same time, it is expressed via an aesthetic spectacle of world-sacrifice, a cinematic sacrifice of the 'corrupted' image-world defining our melancholy experience of post-humanist modernity. Just as Justine prepares for the end with Claire and young Leo, von Trier prepares the spectator for an aesthetic experience of world-destruction from within the 'magic cave' of cinema. *Melancholia*'s radical gesture of world-sacrifice thus offers an intimation of the ethical challenge posed by the thought of world-destruction: the difficulty of imagining a future beyond the end of the world, which is also the paradoxical intimation of a post-humanist beginning.

12

Television as Philosophy: Reflections on *Black Mirror*

Chapter Outline

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The 'film as philosophy' debate has thus far featured mainly narrative fictional films (rather than documentary) with recent work featuring popular genre films (with some recognition of experimental cinema). Although this rather narrow construal of the 'canon' of philosophical films has begun to shift (with the inclusion of documentary, arthouse, slow cinema, animation and world cinemas),[1] television is only recently being recognised as worthy of philosophical consideration for its aesthetic features and ethical aspects (see Carroll 2001; Engell 2021; Nannicelli 2017). Little attention, however, has been given to the possibility of including televisual works in the 'film as philosophy' debate (see Coehlo 2019: 319–341). Given the profound shift brought about by digital media technologies and the rise of cinematic television as found in the much-praised long-form television serial (Nannicelli 2017), it is timely to turn to television as offering possibilities to explore the idea of 'cinema as philosophy' in ways that make original and creative use of the affordances of television as a medium. Far from spelling the 'death of cinema', the mutations of the medium that have flourished in

both digital media works and in the televisual domain suggest that the possibilities for exploring the varieties of 'cinematic thinking' across different mediums have only just begun.[2]

One such televisual work is the award-winning anthology series *Black Mirror* (Brooker, 2011–2019), which has attracted widespread praise and critical acclaim, inspiring at least two volumes dedicated to exploring its philosophical dimensions (Johnson and Irwin 2019; Shaw, Marshall and Rocha 2021).[3] Recalling the anthology format of *The Twilight Zone*, *Black Mirror* presents compelling depictions of near future scenarios exploring the dark side of contemporary digital technology and audiovisual culture. Although they belong to the genre of dystopian science fiction, we could also describe the episodes of *Black Mirror* as works of speculative cinematic fiction deploying a variety of genres such as psychological horror, science fantasy and the socio-political thriller.[4] The standalone episodes of the five series of *Black Mirror* explore the uncanny, the fantastic and the speculative in fiction but always with specific reference to our technologically mediated sense of social reality. With their focus on the ethical implications of current and future technological possibilities, *Black Mirror* offers a compelling case study to explore the idea of 'televisual philosophy'. In what follows I shall develop this thesis by exploring three related ways of approaching this acclaimed television series: 1) *Black Mirror* as thought experiment; 2) as reflecting a critique of modern technology; 3) as engaged in critical self-reflection on audiovisual media and on its own status as episodic television.

The episodes of *Black Mirror* pose sophisticated thought experiments concerning the ethical implications of modern technology and digital screen culture. If long-form TV serials like *The Wire*, *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad* and *House of Cards* recall the extended narrative structure, character development and complex world-building familiar from 19th and 20th century (realist) novels, then the anthology format of *Black Mirror*, focusing on particular situations, specific characters and well-defined ideas, is more akin to the short story. In this respect, they not only present compelling televisual fictions but offer powerful cinematic thought experiments that can serve as productive ways of engaging philosophical thinking. As we have seen, the idea of 'film as thought experiment', familiar from 'film as philosophy' debates (Davies 2019; Sinnerbrink 2011b, 2014c; Wartenberg 2007), has been renewed in recent work focusing on complex narratives and 'mind-game films' (Elsaesser 2008, 2019). Elsaesser (2019), for example, has argued that cinematic thought experiments, particularly within European cinema, tend to take more ethico-political and cultural-historical forms than within Anglophone cinema. He

focuses, in particular, on the ethical aporias and political deadlocks facing European societies as well as the 'productive contradictions' confronted by contemporary auteurs who turn the increasingly displaced or marginalised position of European cinematic traditions into a site of artistic possibility and cinematic creativity.[5] Whatever the format, the idea of televisual thought experiments, emphasising ethico-political, epistemic, metaphysical, as well as cinematic aspects, offers a productive way of conceptualising *Black Mirror* episodes within the more compressed format of serial television. In addition to testing our moral intuitions, framing alternative realities and exploring possible outcomes via hypothetical fictional scenarios, cinematic thought experiments can also provide distinctive contributions to moral-philosophical reflection as well as pointed ethical reflections on contemporary digital media and social media technologies.

Indeed, *Black Mirror*'s pointed critical reflections on the ethical implications of modern technology often recall but also extend the speculations of philosophers of technology from Heidegger to Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard. In a related vein, *Black Mirror* allows us to revisit the debate concerning 'film in the condition of philosophy' (Mulhall 2008; Neiva 2019; Smuts 2009b; Wartenberg 2007) thanks to its self-reflexive engagement with contemporary media technologies. The episodes of *Black Mirror* reflect on their own status as audiovisual media, and comment on the role of television as well as social and digital media as part of an integrated audiovisual system with disturbing ethical and political implications. By reflecting upon its episodes' own conditions, complicity and critical potentials, *Black Mirror* displays the kind of aesthetic and cinematic self-reflexivity that Mulhall (2008: 1–11) claims is one way that cinema – or in this case television – can be philosophical, namely as existing in the 'condition of philosophy'.

What Is *Black Mirror*?

Originating with British writer Charlie Brooker, *Black Mirror* comprises five series spanning 22 episodes that range between 40 and 90 minutes long. Brooker worked in television as a presenter, comic scriptwriter and online satirist, becoming infamous for his biting satirical website TVGoHome, writing and presenting a documentary series, *How TV Ruined Your Life* (2011), and writing scripts for the television horror serial *Dead Set* (where zombies threaten to invade a Big Brother television set). The crude

descriptions of popular television shows lampooned in TVGoHome and satirical comic projects such as *Nathan Barley* (2005) (based on a vapid, narcissistic media/fashion 'influencer') and the fake reality TV show *Daily Mail Island*[6] explored themes and scenarios that would be treated in more depth and seriousness in *Black Mirror*. The first two series, comprising three episodes each, plus a special ('White Christmas') episode, were commissioned by Channel 4 in the UK (2011 to 2013), while the next three series (six, six and three episodes respectively), were made for Netflix (2014 to 2019). As I discuss below, Netflix also features in the interactive 'television film', 'Bandersnatch' (2018). All are standalone episodes with different characters, settings and timeframes (generally set in the UK, the US and Europe, from the 1980s to the near future). Yet various episodes also allude to each other in implicit ways, including a number of 'Easter Eggs' (implicit references, recurring symbols or sundry connecting details) left for fans of the series to discover and enjoy. Beyond adding 'texture' (as Brooker puts it), the possibility of cross-referencing features appearing in different episodes also suggests a more intersecting network or 'enfoldment' of references that could be described as comprising an interactive *Black Mirror* mediaverse (an idea explicitly articulated in 'Bandersnatch').

The title of the series is telling. Referring to the black appearance of a device's screen when switched off, a dark 'mirror' in which the user can only see her face dimly, the title also suggests the metaphor of holding a mirror up to our fascination with digital media and social media culture. It suggests the 'dark side' of the technological possibilities afforded by modern media technologies and the social and cultural effects of its ubiquitous presence and proliferating uses. As Circucci and Vacker point out in their introduction to a recent volume on *Black Mirror* (2018), the opening credit sequence develops this idea in visual form. The black screen appears with a familiar graphic – the rotating circular figure of the device starting up, otherwise known as a 'throbber' – suggesting obscure digital operations occurring behind the screen, hidden power and invisible processing of information, which then disintegrates and reconstitutes itself as the title, 'Black Mirror', accompanied by an ominous throbbing sound as the screen glass suddenly cracks. Circucci and Vacker draw parallels with the opening sequence of *The Twilight Zone*, which, as screenwriter and producer Rod Serling remarked, allowed contemporary moral and political themes to be explored by transposing them into science-fiction or speculative genres. Brooker has taken up Serling's strategy and developed it into a highly self-reflexive engagement with the cultural ethics and politics of contemporary digital

culture. As Cerruci and Vacker observe, *Black Mirror* is '*The Twilight Zone* of the 21st century', a 'philosophical classic that echoes the angst of an era' (2018: vii). Or as Stephen King tweeted, *Black Mirror* is 'like *The Twilight Zone*, only Rated R' (quoted in Harvey 2016), to which we might add that it also offers a fascinating case study of televisual philosophy.

As commentators have noted, the series is best described as focusing on the 'near future', or an 'alternative present', extrapolating from contemporary social phenomena and technological possibilities that already exist, and amplifying and examining their potential effects and social implications now and in the future (Cerruci and Vacker 2018; Martin 2018). This generates an uncanny 'anticipatory' effect or *déjà là* [pre-emptive or premonitory] effect that combines both recognisable features of the present with disturbing yet plausible amplifications of existing technologies in order to explore their possible social and ethical consequences. The 'allegorical' dimension of the 1950s *Twilight Zone* episodes – using science fiction and speculative fiction scenarios to comment on contemporary cultural and political issues such as racism and Cold War politics – has shifted in *Black Mirror*. The latter adopts, rather, a reverse strategy to that of allegory: an uncanny simulation involving slight displacements and amplifications of the familiar but opaque present, which, in a reflexive and recursive movement – we can see that the show depicts both our present and an alternative future – is thereby rendered both familiar and strange, recognisable and threatening. Like the term 'Kafkaesque', 'Black Mirror' has itself become a byword to describe disturbing developments involving technological media and their social implications.[7]

Black Mirror is also indebted, however, to various television and film genres. These include psychological and social horror ('Get Up and Dance', 'Metalhead', 'Black Museum'); the socio-political thriller ('The National Anthem', 'Hated in the Nation'); domestic social drama ('Be Right Back'); elements of the police procedural ('Hated in the Nation', 'Crocodile'); romance ('San Junipero', 'Hang the DJ'); but also computer gaming technologies and formats, which feature explicitly in some episodes ('Metalhead', 'Playtest', 'Bandersnatch', 'Striking Vipers'). The crossmedial character of many episodes, combining cinematic, televisual, social media and computer gaming styles and techniques make these episodes difficult to classify and are a distinctive feature of the series' televisual style (which darkly mirrors or mimics its objects). The episodes in general are characterised by tight scripting and high production values, using new directors (along with occasional veterans such as John Hillcoat and Jodie Foster) along with lesser-known actors playing discrete characters who do

not reappear across the different episodes. Another distinctive feature is the manner in which individual episodes adopt elements of what we might call a social media/digital culture style, mimicking some of the aesthetic features of social media, digital technologies, gaming technology and so on, in the episodes' own audiovisual aesthetic presentation (see di Summa 2019). 'Fifteen Million Merits', for example, combines a luridly colourful 'gaming' style coupled with drab grey clothing and interiors that blends into the fictional world of the protagonists. They live as virtual prisoners in a digitally mediatised environment as they earn 'merits' by using stationary bike equipment, and whose only hope of escape is via auditioning for a brutally exploitative reality TV talent show, *Hot Shot* (modelled on *The X-Factor*). 'Nosedive', as I discuss further below, adopts a smooth, slick, pastel coloured style to reflect the 'Instagrammatisation' of everyday life that defines the socially mediatised world of Lacey [Bryce Dallas Howard], desperately trying to boost her social media ranking in order to get a new apartment and thereby elevate her social status and economic prospects.[8]

It is also worth noting how well the short, episodic format fits with the series' focus on digital media culture. As opposed to the long-form television serial, with its multiple narrative lines, extended character development arcs and complex world-building, the short-form episodic format focuses on particular characters in specific situations, situated within a briefly sketched but well-defined context. Characters are rapidly delineated, rather 'generic' or typical in presentation (representing a particular social type or recognisable kind of subjectivity), which means that viewers have less opportunity for complex forms of emotional engagement compared with the long-form television serial. Dramatic narrative development is elliptical, often structured by a conceptual scenario or hypothetical situation, and swiftly articulated in narrative terms within a tightly defined temporal frame. *Black Mirror* foregrounds the role of technology: the relationships between characters are not only mediated via social media technologies but their sense of self is essentially dependent on the technologies that shape and structure both their identity and their social world. In short, the deliberately 'flat'' presentation of character, sharply delineated narrative situations, technologically mediated relationships and identities, and conceptual or idea-driven narrative development make this kind of short-form episodic series, as I argue below, the ideal medium for staging televisual film-philosophical thought experiments.

The series is distinguished by its 'dark' vision of technology, exploring the ethical implications of digital technological culture and the ubiquitous

power of social media to shape subjectivity under conditions that Zuboff describes as 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff 2019). The latter refers to our contemporary social, economic and cultural-political situation wherein techniques of surveillance are applied to the tracking and harvesting of information designed to influence not only consumer choices but to shape social conduct, colonise personal identities, monetise data, instrumentalise culture and manipulate political decision-making. Unlike long-form television serials, which can compose a complex fictional world populated by densely drawn characters, *Black Mirror* constructs its broader 'global' perspective in a mosaic or fragmentary manner, isolating particular problems or possibilities, exploring them within hypothetical social scenarios and allowing the accumulated perspectives to suggest a fragmentary constellation that does not constitute a uniform whole. One way of elaborating this thesis is to identify thematic clusters that recur across the various episodes, with particular episodes foregrounding particular themes but that also allow for intersecting, overlapping and corresponding themes to be explored from different perspectives within particular narrative situations. In what follows, I outline a range of such thematic clusters, which represent a 'clustering' of cognate themes and ideas that at the same time coalesce and recur over different episodes and seasons.

Black Mirror Thematic Clusters

A number of thematic clusters recur within and across the stylistically and generically distinct episodes of *Black Mirror*, lending the series both coherence and diversity. The most obvious thematic cluster concerns *digital media thought experiments*: film-philosophical fictional situations that extrapolate from, and explore further, the possible uses, abuses and ethical implications of existing, as well as slightly amplified, forms of digital technology and audiovisual media. What if a 'wearable' augmented reality (AR) technology were devised capable of 'recording' our experiences, thereby rendering memories available in digital formats to be reviewed by the user? What are the personal and social uses to which such AR technology could be put? What kind of effect would it have on our sense of personal identity and on our personal and social relationships? 'The Entire History of You' [S1 E3] stages just such a scenario as a film-philosophical digital media thought experiment, showing how individuals would most likely all adopt the new technology, outsource their personal memories, and share their experiences

with others (having shared 'redo' sessions with friends). Companies could use this information in the selection and management of employees (as we see when protagonist Liam [Toby Kebbell] pores over the 'redo' of his workplace performance management meeting). Government and security agencies could use it to monitor, check and conduct surveillance on members of the public (as we see during an airport security-check scene in which Liam is asked to produce his memories of the previous days). It could also wreak havoc on personal relationships by eliminating the unreliability of memory or discretionary freedom afforded by forgetting, depicting a Nietzschean nightmare of objective veridical memory being available for forensic scrutiny at any time. We experience such a scenario by observing Liam obsessively reviewing the 'redo' of his wife Ffion [Jodie Whittaker] talking and laughing with a man who turns out to be an old flame, arousing Liam's jealous suspicions that they had an affair in the past.

This concern links with another prominent theme, which we could describe as the concern over *waning authenticity/commodified intimacy*, which again pervades many episodes in different ways. 'Fifteen Million Merits' [S1 E2] offers a brutal critique of this tendency, depicting a dystopian future in which individuals, virtually imprisoned in tiny giant-screen panelled cells, work daily to gain 'merits' by generating energy on exercise bicycles. Their only form of entertainment, whether on the bike or in their cells, is a narrow selection of streamed video displays and television shows ranging from fat-shaming/bullying prank programmes, pornographic scenarios, to amateur television talent contests that offer the false hope of an escape from oppressive reality via the fame accrued from winning the fickle public's favour. Bing [Daniel Kaluuya], the protagonist, who has accumulated 15 million merits through assiduous training on the stationary bike, meets and is attracted to Abi [Jessica Brown Findlay], a young woman he notices singing a soulful 1960s romantic pop song, 'Anyone Who Knows What Love Is (Will Understand)', and the two share an obvious, if forbidden, attraction. Bing convinces her to try out for *Hot Shot*, a vicious talent quest programme, and to sing her song, feeling that its pathos and authenticity offer a tiny breath of freedom in their oppressively manipulated and automated world, where individuals are forced to endure wall-to-wall advertising for products and shows, even in their sleeping quarters.

Sadly, Abi's beauty and authenticity when performing her song, which appears momentarily to move the judges, is soon channelled into cynical and exploitative populist enthusiasm. She is pressured into accepting a role (having ingested a psychotropic drink before going on stage) on one of the

judges' pornographic TV channels. Bing, in despair and guilt, sets out to accumulate enough merits to audition on the show himself. He does so, cleverly avoiding consuming the compulsory cup of 'Cuppliance' – a liquid drug designed to diminish the contestants' resistance – and commences a hip-hop routine that he soon discards. Instead, he launches into a live television protest, holding a shard of glass to his neck, where he denounces the oppressive, enslaving social world, speaking the truth to power while threatening to commit suicide live on television. The judges, initially nonplussed, seem impressed with his power and authenticity, and offer him his own television slot – the rebellious protest now seamlessly incorporated into the entertainment fare on offer as a domesticated release of anger and dissent amidst the mindless infotainment and exploitative pornography otherwise on offer. As Adorno and Horkheimer observed back in the 1940s, the culture industry relentless generates and commodifies novelty, all the better to appropriate and neutralise dissent: 'Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1991 [1944]): 123). The episode concludes with Bing having 'escaped' his confinement only to reside in an upscale apartment, his signature glass shard carefully stored in a velvet box, as her performs on cue for television and enjoys his simulated 'forest' view in solitary confinement. The authentic rebel speaking truth to power is now an economically comfortable but docile celebrity efficiently co-opted into the system.

Other episodes stage similar digital thought experiments. 'Arkangel' [S4 E2] depicts a parental surveillance device that allows overprotective parents to track their children via GPS coordinates, but also to edit unpleasant environmental stimuli by pixelating potential 'stressful' perceptions or events and even occupy their offspring's subjective point of view (unbeknownst to the child). This becomes deeply invasive and morally unacceptable when Marie [Rosemarie DeWitt] tracks her daughter, Sara [Brenna Harding], whom she suspects of using drugs, only to inadvertently 'tune in' to her point of view while Sara is having sex with her boyfriend. In 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too' [S5 E3], a pop performer, Ashley O [Miley Cyrus], whose consciousness is partially downloaded into a commercially available AI doll, ends up being replaced by a holographic digitally simulated performer once she begins to assert her own artistic autonomy. She is rendered comatose through secretly administered drugs once she refuses to comply with her record company's demands, but manages to escape captivity (thanks to the teenagers enlisting the help of the AI doll, whose consciousness is cloned

from Ashley's) and expose her captors before a stunned live concert audience. Adding to the reflexive, philosophical dimension of the episode, Miley Cyrus plays Ashley O (whose own life partially parallels that of Cyrus and other female pop performers – like Britney Spears – subjected to familial, economic or record company control), a performer who rebels against the demand to produce cynically marketed 'positivity culture' pop tunes (her hit song is actually a reworked Nine Inch Nails track). After being liberated from her coma and exposing her captors, she ends up performing an ironic grunge-punk version of the song at the end of the episode.

A related thematic cluster concerns *gamification threats*: extrapolating from the increasing popularity of gaming as a paradigmatic form of audiovisual media and examining the potentially toxic effects that such immersive, distractive and interactive formats could have, especially within the context of exploitative neoliberal surveillance capitalism. These episodes also typically combine or involve digital media thought experiments, and could be described as exploring the possibilities of a VR/AI ethics that arise either once such entities develop forms of sentient self-awareness, or if human consciousness could in some way be digitised or transferred across different embodied 'platforms'. 'Playtest' [S3 E2] focuses on the scenario of using a player as a live test subject in an experimental immersive 'horror' gaming situation. Test player, Cooper [Wyatt Russell], an American traveller down on his luck, agrees to be a test subject to pay his way back home after losing his money. He begins to lose his memories and suffer disruptions of consciousness, thanks to the augmented reality technology and targeting of the player's own personal deepest fears as key elements in constructing the immersive VR game (psychological black ops applied to computer gaming technology). In a final twist, we discover that subsequent events we have seen were simulated; Cooper received a phone call from his mother during the gaming simulation, an unexpected interruption to the network linking his neural synapses with the VR simulation that results in his tragic death.

The potentials of interactive gaming, and the significance of interactivity more generally, often cited as an affirmative counterpoint to the 'passivity' of traditional film and television viewing, is subjected to critical scrutiny in 'Bandersnatch'. Set in the year 1984, it tells the (interactive/choose your own adventure) story of a young programmer, Stefan [Fionn Whitehead], who is contracted by gaming company Tuckersoft to work on a radical new game based on a cult interactive fantasy novel (*Bandersnatch*), written by a reclusive author, Jerome F. Davies [Jeff Minter], who went mad and murdered his wife.[9] Stefan, under increasing pressure to finish the game in time for

Christmas sales, finds his own grasp of reality beginning to slip, the more immersed he becomes in both creating the game, desperately trying to resolve problems before the deadline arrives, while suspecting something more sinister and inexplicable is happening to him and to the game behind the scenes.

There are, moreover, multiple versions of the story, with different plot developments depending on the choices made by viewers. This feeds into the explicitly metafictional element reflecting on the nature of interactive gaming as well as the status of 'Bandersnatch' itself as just such a commercial product (produced by Netflix, which itself features in the episode). There are intriguing reflections on free will and determinism within the context of fictional narrative and gaming culture, culminating in the enfoldment of the viewer/player within the bifurcating and intersecting fictional world(s) of *Black Mirror*/Netflix itself. It becomes apparent that it is not just the deadline pressures applied by Tuckersoft within the story-world, but the viewer at home controlling or directing events in the Netflix/*Black Mirror* story world, which constitutes the real source of Stefan's existential unease, his intuition that he is subject to deterministic forces beyond his control.

As a fictional character, created by a writer/director (Brooker) and subjected to the commercial and corporate demands of Netflix, Stefan is also controlled, it turns out, by us as consumers/users of this interactive narrative – a reflexive structure that foregrounds the 'cursed' interactive story Stefan creates, while also reflecting on the manipulated and 'determined' character of interactive narratives more generally. The viewer too is 'controlled' by the forced narrative choices available, is implicated in the manipulation of narrative events, meaning and existential choice pre-selected for both characters and viewers/players via *Bandersnatch*'s interactive narrative structure. It becomes clear that we are the ultimate arbiters of the 'choose-your-own-adventure' interactive narrative and manipulated at the same time by this interactive narrative structure. We are also the teleological endpoint ('endusers') of the accursed videogame platform, from its troubled inception in the 1980s, thanks to the unfortunate Stefan, to the present time of our own interactive Netflix viewing in the 21st century – a pre-programmed, mediatised world wherein our own commodified adventures, it seems, have already been engineered and pre-ordained for us.

'Striking Vipers' [S5 E2] explores a different aspect of gaming, the intersection between subjectivity, identity and sexuality. It does so through the story of two college buddies, Danny [Anthony Mackie] and Karl [Yahya Abdul Mateen II], who renew their friendship in mature adult life, re-establishing

their bond by playing the X-rated version of their favourite martial arts game, 'Striking Vipers'. Not only do the men become more interested and immersed in the gaming world than in their real-life personal relationships, they enter into an ambiguous virtual reality fantasy sexual relationship involving the crossing of gender and racial lines via their chosen gaming avatars (family man Danny and playboy Karl adopting the avatars of a heterosexual 'Eurasian' mixed-race martial arts couple). Here the idea of technological prostheses (gaming avatars) becoming subjective supplements/replacements (supplanting the characters' real-world relationships and replacing these with the hybrid identities enacting their sexual fantasies within a digital world) becomes a focus of participatory involvement and critical attention. They arrive at a compromise arrangement with their female partners (limiting their online sexual relationship and incorporating a real-world fantasy element), suggesting an apt metaphor for the complex relationship between real-world and digital versions of our social subjectivities.

Another pervasive thematic cluster concerns *toxic social media effects* and *social-political hacking threats*, which together provide the focus for numerous episodes, which we could also describe as staging film-philosophical thought experiments. From *Black Mirror*'s first episode, 'The National Anthem' [S1 E1], to one of the fifth season episodes, 'Smithereens' [S5 E2], the ubiquity of social media usage and its colonisation of personal identity and shaping of subjectivity, distorting of communicative and social relations, and potentially toxic cultural and political effects are recurring and intersecting themes. 'The National Anthem', set in contemporary London, melds political thriller with contemporary anxieties over terrorism, cyberterrorism and the (social) media manipulation of politics and political opinion, staging a scenario where an unknown 'terrorist' kidnaps 'the people's Princess' (a clear reference to Diana) and demands, by way of ransom, that the Prime Minister perform a degrading sex act (with a pig) on live television. Apart from the recognisable references to contemporary political figures and plausibly realistic forms of (cyber) terrorist threat, the episode examines the disturbing convergence of prurient entertainment, pornographic degradation, the relevance of 'shock' art, manipulation of popular opinion and toxic intertwining of media and politics today.[10]

The toxicity of social media driven 'pile-on' culture provides the premise for 'Shut Up and Dance' [S3 E3], which elaborates the idea of unknown hackers using toxic ransomware to target individuals using questionable websites, and then forcing them to perform antisocial acts including theft and, as it turns out, manslaughter. As with 'The National Anthem' and other

episodes, 'Shut Up and Dance' features a twist ending that plays on audience sympathetic engagement with the tormented protagonist. In this episode we observe an unassuming young man, Kenny [Alex Lawther], working as a kitchenhand and mildly bullied by his co-workers, who inadvertently downloads the malicious software while browsing privately at home. He is then forced into a harrowingly stressful sequence of actions – robbing a bank, for example – culminating in a videoed fight 'to the death' with another victim, whose victim status is thrown into doubt by the revelation that he was originally targeted by the hackers while browsing paedophilic websites. It becomes clear, by episode's end, that the other individuals targeted by the malware ransom demands were all engaged in morally dubious uses of the internet, whether for cheating, cyberbullying, trolling or harassment. The 'twist' ending in this and other episodes, playing on our initial assumptions about the role of victim and perpetrator – assumptions about morally permissible and impermissible forms of censure and punishment, and credibility of online social media communication and activism – are all put into question and re-framed by the episode's disturbing concluding revelation. The effect is an acute moral-cognitive dissonance: we are shocked and sympathetic to the protagonists' horrendous plight, but then have to reconcile this sympathetic response with the revelation that, Kenny, for example, was targeted for his paedophiliac desires. This raises pointed questions concerning our assumptions regarding moral judgement, ethical responsibility, social media 'pile on' culture, retributive practices of punishment and the ways in which social media and internet culture have dramatically altered all of these social and cultural phenomena.

'Nosedive' [S3 E1], directed by Joe Wright, takes the pervasive influence of social media image curation, the competitive culture of accumulating 'likes' and boosting social media 'rankings', to its disturbing moral as well as logical conclusion. It imagines a society in which individuals rate each other (on a scale of 1 to 5) for all of their social interactions, and one's social media rating (out of 5) determines not only one's social status but economic opportunities, career prospects, choice of real estate, travel options, personal flourishing, romantic relationships, even membership of the social community. Like other *Black Mirror* episodes, it enacts a slight amplification of contemporary technological possibilities and social practices, thereby magnifying their social, cultural and ethical implications. It explores what might happen if the 'Instagrammatisation of everyday life' were to be directly linked to social status, professional mobility and economic success. It tells the story of Lacey, who seeks to boost her social rating score (4.2) in order to

secure a new apartment. She consults professionals, curates her online image and accepts an invitation from a highly rated 'influencer' friend to speak at her wedding. After an altercation with airport staff, where Lacey becomes agitated following the cancellation of her flight, she is confronted by a security guard who penalises her a whole point. After further unfortunate exchanges, Lacey's social rating 'nosedives' as she struggles to make her way to the wedding in the cheapest, most outmoded hire car available, which breaks down and cannot be recharged (all because of her lowered social rating). Her picaresque nightmarish journey, which includes hitching a ride with a busload of sci-fi TV fans and a sobering encounter with a female trucker who opted out of the rating system after her husband died of cancer, Lacey finally makes it to wedding, albeit late, dishevelled and drunk. She delivers an inchoate but accurate truth-telling rant to the bride and her fashionable guests, a perfectly primed and curated gathering of manipulative media influencers and ruthless success stories, and then is arrested for assault. She is escorted to a prison cell, the only space left where she and a fellow 'inmate' can now express their anger and other messy emotions freely without fear of social punishment.

'Nosedive' offers a compelling critical reflection on social media image curation and self-marketisation that not only threatens to undermine social relationships, but also provides the technological and social means for an oppressive and manipulative 'social credit system', designed to track, monitor, influence and control citizens' behaviour. Far from being science fiction, such a system currently exists already in China (see Zhou and Xiao 2020). At the same time, *Black Mirror* episodes such as 'Nosedive' *mimic* social media/digital culture's aesthetic style: 'Nosedive' uses a beguilingly appealing and engaging aesthetic that mirrors or reflects its critical object, an 'Instagrammatisable' pastel-coloured world of arresting social media images, designer technology, AR enhanced images of social reality and alluring forms of digital media consumer pleasure (see di Summa 2019). The technological devices that feature in different *Black Mirror* episodes faithfully mimic technological devices that also embody appealing aesthetic design (what we might call the Apple effect). The episodes deploy temporal compression and narrative ellipsis, coupled with rapidly sketched, deliberately 'thin' characterisation, thereby mimicking the kind of rapid tempo of narrative presentation, or 'gaming' style, familiar from contemporary digital media and their accompanying viewing (and playing) practices. In this sense, the episodes' aesthetic style adds performative counterpoint to the more familiar moral and social-political critique of the alienating,

dehumanising or socially exploitative aspects of contemporary digital culture technologies.[11]

This focus on toxic social media effects links up with another thematic cluster, which we could call the dangers of *surveillance/data harvesting culture*. The latter have become, as remarked above, a defining feature of 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff 2019): the harvesting of data and information concerning consumer choices, preferences, attention and behaviour as a way of influencing and manipulating the population. In 'Hated in the Nation' [S3 E6], one narrative line dealing with the introduction of 'drone' insect swarms to replace extinct bees intersects with another narrative line dealing with the phenomenon of online trolling and social media denunciation culture. The latter takes a deadly turn via the 'Game of Consequences' centred on the viral spread of the #deathto hashtag, which gathers data in order to identify the most popular media pariah of the day (most hated in the nation), who is then targeted by anonymous hacktivists and killed via the weaponised drone bees. The network of drone bees depends on a vast informational surveillance network that the hacktivists take over and exploit in order to demonstrate, in violent and brutal terms, the 'real-world' consequences of the vicious manipulation of public opinion made possible by the convergence of social media, news as infotainment and political opinion management (which also features in 'The National Anthem').

A number of episodes explore the *distortion of personal identity* thanks to the unbridled adoption of reality augmentation technologies. 'The Entire History of You', as remarked, introduces an implanted consciousness recording device (called a 'grain') that captures the wearer's perceptions via wearable lens technology and allows him or her to record and replay their experiences as though from a vast digital video archive. 'Be Right Back' [S2 E1] explores a fascinating possibility: that of constructing a posthumous digital avatar based on the deceased person's digital footprint. Social media addict Ash [Domhnall Gleeson] is tragically killed in a traffic accident, leaving his pregnant girlfriend Martha [Hayley Atwell] in grief. She reluctantly takes up the advice of a friend to try a new AI avatar technology, which recreates a digital version of her deceased partner – based on data harvesting his entire social media digital footprint – that is supposed to help her cope with her loss but instead becomes a substitute for her grieving. The episode takes this idea a step further by depicting the possibility of a synthetic bioflesh version of the deceased partner being brought back to life. The synthetic Ash, based on his recorded digital social media posts, lacks many personality features of the real Ash; he shifts from being an uncanny

substitute for her dead partner – one that she cannot bring herself to terminate or kill – to an awkwardly maintained prisoner locked away in Martha's attic, who is visited weekly by Martha's and Ash's young daughter. Here the ethics of how we might have to treat VR/AI entities is staged with pathos and plausibility, rendering the tragic circumstance of an imprisoned digital/bioflesh copy of a deceased person in vivid and confronting terms.

Many episodes explore the possibilities of *digitising consciousness*, examining the possible social uses and ethical implications of such technological processing of consciousness. In addition to 'The Entire History of You', 'Crocodile' or 'Playtest', which feature technological means of digitising consciousness as part of augmented reality technology, there are other episodes that focus on the pernicious uses to which such technologies could be put. One is the idea of a virtual reality form of immortality involving the uploading of a digitised form of artificial consciousness. 'San Junipero' [S3 E4], one of the rare optimistic episodes in *Black Mirror*, is a romance centred on the idea of uploading consciousness into a virtual format such that friends and relatives who remain behind in the real world could visit deceased people in a virtual world, spanning different time-periods. In the episode, introverted Yorkie [Mackenzie Davis] meets extroverted Kelly [Gugu Mbatha-Raw] in a bar in the resort town of San Junipero in 1987 and they have a brief fling. Later, Yorkie can no longer find Kelly and follows a suggestion from a stranger that she look for her in a different time, trying unsuccessfully in 1980, 1996, before finally locating her in 2002. In reality, Yorkie is dying, having spent her life paralysed after a car accident following a clash with her parents over her coming out as a teenager, and wishes now to depart the real world and upload her consciousness into the virtual world of San Junipero. Kelly marries her and authorises the uploading of Yorkie's artificial consciousness. Her own health failing, Kelly decides to do the same, leaving the memories of her husband and child behind as she is reunited with Yorkie in a virtual afterlife. Much like *Be Right Back*, this episode considers the utopian desire for immortality and reunion with the dead that might be made possible via the digitising of consciousness and construction of artificial avatars of the dead in virtual reality.[12]

Taking more contextual perspective, as many episodes of *Black Mirror* do, we can cite a number of episodes that deal with the idea of *a control society / surveillance capitalism*. By this I mean the deployment of subtle mechanisms of control (rather than overt forms of disciplinary power or mechanisms of punishment), where such mechanisms (extending performance management practices to all areas of life and imposing 'social credit' systems to shape

individual conduct) eliminate the need for more coercive forms of social control by becoming internalised and self-regulating (Deleuze 1992). Such mechanisms of control are harnessed by broader networks of social surveillance and data harvesting techniques; together they can facilitate control in the workplace, in schools and other social institutions, in the marketplace and in the political domain, tracking consumer choices and behaviours in order to influence, direct and control citizens' attitudes and behaviours (Zuboff 2019). Episodes such as 'Hated in the Nation', 'Fifteen Million Merits', 'Nosedive', 'Men Against Fire', 'White Bear', 'Crocodile', 'Arkangel' and 'Smithereens' focus on different aspects of these mechanisms, their capacity to penetrate and shape our subjectivity, and their potentially oppressive social, cultural, economic and political uses.

This theme links up with the cluster concerning the *militarisation of everyday life / weaponising biotechnology / technoterrorism*: a number of episodes show how one of the manifestations of this system of informational-societal control involves 'militarising' aspects of everyday life, harnessing the power of information data harvesting via social media platforms and other forms of ubiquitous online activity. 'Men Against Fire' [S3 E5], for example, portrays a scenario where, under the guise of managing the risk of PTSD, soldiers are equipped with wearable augmented reality technology that screens out the human form of target agents, rendering them rather as terrifying humanoid mutants, known as 'roaches', thus eliminating the potentially traumatic character of being forced to shoot or kill human targets as required in military or security operations.[13] This AR technological 'solution' to the problem of how to train soldiers to kill with minimal risk of psychological damage by manipulating perceptual and thus moral awareness of other human beings is chillingly rendered from the first-person viewpoint of the soldiers themselves. In computer game-like fashion, we inhabit the first-person perspective of protagonists engaged in 'sweeping' operations where they are charged with eliminating the 'roaches' hiding from authorities. When one soldier, Stripe [Malachi Kirby], finds his AR device beginning to malfunction, he subsequently learns the truth when he witnesses his fellow soldiers killing people during their operations: namely, that his neural implant device is designed to alter his perception of reality in order to make it 'easier' to kill refugees hiding in the community. When he is shown footage of himself and fellow soldiers engaged in what is described as a 'genetic cleansing' operation, killing refugees in hiding without remorse, he is offered the choice of resetting his neural implant AR device or being imprisoned. The allegorical political resonances with the technologically manipulated

'policing' and border protection operations conducted against 'illegal aliens' – which the soldiers perceive as swarms of inhuman 'vermin' thanks to AR technology – clearly refers to the rising xenophobia towards refugees manifested in Europe and elsewhere across the globe.

This exploration of the disturbing implications of manipulating our social and moral perceptions via technology is linked with the social manifestations of aggression, resentment, anger and voyeurism familiar from online trolling and the desensitising effects of images of violence coexisting with banal forms of streamed infotainment. As mentioned, 'Shut Up and Dance' explores this tendency within the context of hacking and manipulating online activity. 'White Bear' [S2 E2], by contrast, stages the spectacle of punishment in the form of a televised survivor reality TV 'game' perpetrated on a woman [Lenora Critchlow] who wakes up one morning in an unfamiliar room without any memories of how she got there. Her television screen displays a mysterious symbol or glyph (resembling an inverted Y, but also a symbol of binary code, as reappears in 'Bandersnatch'). She heads outside into the deserted streets, and notices that she is being filmed by neighbours who refuse to reply to her questions. She soon realises that she is in imminent danger from masked and armed attackers ('the hunters') who suddenly appear in a vehicle and chase her brandishing shotguns. She takes shelter in a shop and meets a woman (Jem [Tuppence Middleton) who explains that the passersby have been affected by the televised image of a glyph, which has turned them into passive voyeurs. The women's task is therefore to attack and neutralise a local transmission station ('White Bear') in order to knock out the toxic signal and find refuge from their enemies.

As they attempt to flee the hunters, the woman and Jem are then picked up by a man (Baxter) in a van who is also unaffected by the signal, but turns out to be a sadistic hunter, driving them to a forest, attempting to torture the women, before being shot by Jem. The woman and Jem then escape, find the White Bear transmitter site and attempt to destroy it before being confronted by two other hunters. As the tense, gruelling fight for survival concludes (with the hunters' shotguns turning out to be fake), the walls fall away to reveal a stage set and live audience: the woman has been participating, unwittingly, in a staged 'survival game', with all participants played by actors. More shockingly, it turns out that the woman, named Victoria Skillane, undergoes this ordeal, repeated daily, as a punishment for her role (with her partner) in the kidnapping and murder of a young girl (Jemima Sykes). As spectators, we too are placed in the same disturbing position of confusion as the terrified and tormented woman, who is not only fighting for survival

against unknown enemies, but trying to resolve the mystery of 'White Bear' and accomplish the difficult task that she is called upon to perform (recalling the hacking/ransom scenario in 'Get Up and Dance'). The revelation that what we have been watching was actually a simulated or staged criminal punishment for a woman who we initially assume to be an innocent victim of inexplicable assailants is deeply disorienting and morally troubling. Like the ending of 'Get up and Dance', we are confronted with a twist ending in which an erstwhile victim is revealed as a 'perpetrator' requiring us to reframe and reflect upon our emotional and moral responses (and generating the kind of moral-cognitive dissonance discussed previously).[14] The convergence of gaming and surveillance culture, punishment staged as social spectacle, harnessing current practices of consuming images of violence and suffering online, offers a confronting commentary on the convergence of punishment, media manipulation, social passivity and suffering as entertainment in our highly mediatised 'society of control'.[15]

Finally, it is worth noting that not all episodes of *Black Mirror* focus on the 'dark side' of modern technology. Indeed, *Black Mirror* reveals precisely the kind of ambivalent potentiality of modern technology that Heidegger (1993) warned against: it both threatens a totalising technicist reduction of human beings to a stock of manipulable resources, but also harbours the promise of opening up a transformed way of inhabiting the technological world in a more thoughtful, ethical manner.[16] Where *Black Mirror* goes further than Heidegger, I claim, is by enacting some of these ambivalent potentials of modern technology – especially with respect to digital media technology – in its own forms of audiovisual expression and narrative presentation (precisely as film-philosophical thought experiments). Indeed, some episodes explicitly examine the positive ethical possibilities of such technologies in addition to exploring the negative ethical implications of the manner in which digital and social media technologies have pervaded everyday life. There are a number of episodes, for example, that focus on a thematic cluster that we could call '*the ethics of VR/AI entities*', extrapolating from some of the most recent technological developments and possibilities ('White Christmas', 'Playtest', 'Back in a Minute', 'Black Museum', 'USS Callister', 'Men Against Fire', 'Striking Vipers', 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too'). What kind of ethical issues arise from the emergence of VR/AI entities that may soon have levels of interactivity, self-directed decision-making, functional autonomy, even artificial consciousness, to rival those of human beings? What are the ethics of VR/AI entities should these acquire levels of AI sufficient to warrant recognition as conscious entities in their own right?

The idea of AI entities developing consciousness (explored in films such as *A.I.*, *Her* and *Ex Machina*) is extended in *Black Mirror* to more domestic forms of digital technologies (Alexa-style domestic 'helpers', VR gaming avatars, synthetic digitised AI entities that offer simulacra of deceased individuals and so on), typically presented, again, via the use of compelling televisual thought experiments. The latter feature aesthetically seductive, or else realistically confronting, stylised depictions of contemporary social, media and military technologies that are but a subtle shift from what we already encounter in our everyday worlds.

Black Museum [S4 E6] tells the story of Nish [Letitia Wright], who seemingly wanders on a whim into a decrepit museum of curio technologies. She talks with the owner Rolo [Douglas Hodge], who tells the stories behind the various technological curiosities on display (some of which resonate or refer to other *Black Mirror* episodes). The museum's showcase exhibit is a holographic image of the consciousness of convicted murderer Clayton Leigh, experiencing extreme pain while being executed in the electric chair. Popular with visitors, they are invited to enjoy the spectacle of inflicting the fatal punishment – a ghastly scenario made even more shocking by the racist overtones of white tourists 'enjoying' the power to deliver the fatal voltage to a black prisoner. Nish reveals that she is the daughter of Leigh, who was wrongly convicted and executed, and has come to take her revenge. After poisoning Rolo, she transfers his consciousness into Clayton Leigh's holographic image, forcing Rolo to undergo the torture of Leigh's last minutes before death, an experience that destroys both Leigh and Rolo's digital copies. Nish leaves with a souvenir keyring depicting Rolo's agony, burns down the museum and leaves with her mother (whose consciousness also resides within Nish), saying that her father would have been proud of her.

The ethics of capital punishment, institutionalised racism, the commodification of suffering as consumable spectacle and the ethics of VR/AI entities – whether taking the form of digital copies of living or dead individuals, gaming avatars or transferable forms of digitised consciousness – are probed, performed and questioned here in the guise of a novel revenge thriller. Such themes are also explored, however, in episodes using disparate genres, from satirical forms of sci-fi drama ('USS Callister' as a Star Trek spoof) to domestic/teen drama ('Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too'). 'Black Museum', along with 'San Junipero', 'Rachael, Jack and Ashley Too' and 'Smithereens', all *explore ambiguous forms of technological-ethical resistance*, which remain important, if fragile and uncertain, in the face of the seemingly inexorable convergence of technological, digital and social-political forces

defining contemporary societies of control. As Heidegger observed back in the 1950s (1993: 307), it is not a matter of demonising modern technology or railing helplessly against it as 'the work of the devil', but rather of being open towards it, thoughtfully engaging with its ambivalent potentials, in order to arrive at a more 'free relationship with technology'. This means both acknowledging the threats that it poses to established human ways of existing and the possibilities it affords for ethically transforming our ways of being-in-the-world within technological modernity. In this 'Heideggerian' sprit of engaging in a critical and thoughtful manner with modern technology – a performative critique of digital technology using the very same means – *Black Mirror*'s televisual film-philosophical thought experiments offer confronting and compelling ways of experiencing, and thinking through, the ambivalent potentials and implications of the technologically mediated world.

Black Mirror and Film-Philosophical Thought Experiments

As we have seen, defenders of the 'film as philosophy' thesis – the idea that cinema not only has a pedagogical value but can make significant contributions to philosophical understanding via cinematic means – have often pointed to narrative 'thought experiments' as one way of demonstrating the philosophical potential of cinema. Wartenberg (2008) argues that not only do thought experiments play a significant role in philosophy (from Plato's 'ring of Gyges', Descartes' 'evil demon', to Philippa Foot's 'trolley problem'), but many films can be taken as staging complex thought experiments dealing with recognised philosophical problems (knowledge of reality versus appearances, personal identity, free will versus determinism or competing accounts of moral judgment). Standard philosophical thought experiments (TEs) are abbreviated, schematic and stylised in order to reduce variables and to render particular features of a situation more salient. As Brown and Fehige (2019) point out, they include different forms with various functions such as Karl Popper's well-known classification of *heuristic* (to illustrate a theory), *critical* (offering a counterexample to a theory) and *apologetic* TEs (supporting a theory). Brown and Fehige elaborate this classification in terms of *destructive* and *constructive* TEs. Destructive TEs can point out contradictions, show how a theory conflicts with other beliefs, show when a central assumption of a TE itself is undermined or provide a

counter-TE to competing TEs. Constructive TEs, by contrast, can illustrate a theory or idea, or demonstrate the implications, argument or consequences of a theoretical claim (see Brown and Fehige 2019).

According to these classifications, Wartenberg's examples of *Modern Times* and *The Matrix* would be heuristic and constructive (illustrating Marx's theory of alienated labour and Plato's Cave/Descartes' Evil Demon hypothesis), whereas *The Third Man* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* would be critical and destructive (counterexamples to Aristotle's theory of friendship and utilitarian accounts of happiness respectively). Wartenberg (2007: 117–132) and Carrol (2006b) offer the striking examples of experimental minimalist films *Empire*, *The Flicker* and *Serene Velocity* as cases in point, where *Empire* and *The Flicker* 'foreground the background' normally obscured in our perceptual engagement with film, whereas *Serene Velocity* conducts a cinematic thought experiment examining the photographic character of the medium. Such films are interesting in that they could be either critical and destructive or apologetic and constructive TEs depending on whether they are taken to be counterexamples or exemplifications of differing theoretical claims concerning the cinematic medium.

These experimental films, moreover, clearly qualify as aesthetic thought experiments. A number of philosophers have argued for specifically *aesthetic thought experiments* – Jorge Luis Borges' short story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote', for example, concerning the line-for-line reproduction of Don Quixote, written by Pierre Menard, that because of its historical distance is 'infinitely richer' than Cervantes' original. Such aesthetic thought experiments, as Livingston and Pettersson (2017) remark, are both practical and productive concerning the possibilities and paradoxes of an artistic medium. One of the best examples of a comparable cinematic thought experience that is practical and productive (or performative) would have to be Von Trier's/Leth's *The Five Obstructions*. In the case of *Black Mirror*, we have a range of film-philosophical thought experiments that are both heuristic and critical, destructive and constructive (both exploring the negative implications of contemporary digital and social media technologies, while exemplifying the ambiguous possibilities that such technologies might also afford).

Artistic works and literary fiction can also provide complex, nuanced and realistic kinds of thought experiment (Elgin 2014; Johnson 2016; Kung 2016). As Mark Johnson observes: 'It is the narrative depth, complexity, existential validity of literary fictions that situates moral perception appraisal in contexts that are psychologically more valid than those we typically encounter in most moral philosophy' (Johnson 2016: 365). We might compare this with Peter

Kung's recent critique of ethical 'counterexample thought experiments': the latter, he argues, are implausible because they depend on 'forced choices and fixed outcomes', which is hardly how we would describe the complexity and singularity of most moral judgments and ethical situations. Fictional TEs, by contrast, including cinematic cases like those in *Black Mirror*, acknowledge that choices vary and have unpredictable outcomes (the possibility of moral risk and/or moral luck is ineliminable in actual situations, not just the adventitious result of faulty decision procedures). This point is relevant for the fantasy of technological control as applied to the social curating and technological 'managing' of subjectivity, which is evident in a number of *Black Mirror* televisual thought experiments concerning digital subjectivity (e.g. *Nosedive*, *The Waldo Moment*, *Be Right Back*, *Arkangel*). It is also important in relation to critical and destructive counterexamples concerning some of the more naïve or utopian claims made concerning future applications of AI, VR and AR technologies (*Entire History of You*, *Playtest*, *Men Against Fire*, *Black Museum*).

Cinematic TEs span many genres and can take different forms: romantic drama/comedy (*Eternal Sunshine*, *Being John Malkovich*), science-fiction (*Arrival*, *Her*, *Ex Machina*) to metacinematic fiction (*Adaptation*, *Inland Empire*). They are one important way in which we can describe cinema – and by extension, television – as a 'medium of ethical experience'. In comparison with standard philosophical TEs, cinematic TEs add the power of immersive/emotional engagement in order to evoke complex moral-ethical experiences. We both imagine and observe the cinematic TE unfolding before us; the multimodal character of audiovisual narration enables perceptual, affective-emotional and cognitive-imaginative responses to occur in tandem, creating a complex experience that is immediate and reflective at once. Because of their multimodal and immersive character, cinematic TEs, like other aesthetic TEs, are *practical and performative* (rather than abstract and hypothetical): they are audiovisual 'experience machines' or multimodal simulations of projected possibilities eliciting situational involvement comprising emotional, imaginative and reflective responses.

Conclusion: *Black Mirror* as Televisual Philosophy

To summarise, I have argued that the anthology series *Black Mirror* can be regarded as a contribution to the idea of 'television as philosophy' according

to these three aspects: as televisual film-philosophical thought experiment; as performative exploration and critique of digital and social media technologies; and as engaged in a reflexive critique of audiovisual media and its own status as episodic television. We could call these critical, performative and reflexive modes of 'television as philosophy'. I have endeavoured to show how these three aspects are articulated in *Black Mirror* and thereby justify its status as contributing to philosophical reflection, socio-cultural critique and ethical understanding of our digitally mediated world.

With its short-form narrative format, elliptical presentation of character, well-defined articulation of situation and dramatic unfolding of a key idea or concept, *Black Mirror* offers an ideal platform for the staging of televisual thought experiments. Expressed differently, *Black Mirror* episodes stage *performative audiovisual critiques* of the ethical implications of digital media culture via televisual thought experiments that are both immersive and reflexive, critical and satirical, experiential and speculative. It is clear that *Black Mirror* episodes deal with the question of technology, probing and examining our digital technological engagement with the world. They explore the possibilities, both positive and negative, afforded by 'implantable' AR technology and the prospect of a 'digitisation of experience' (the pervasive use of 'consciousness tracking' devices, the digitising of perception and memory and so on). They also question and reflect upon the ethical and ideological-political implications of these ways of transforming both individual consciousness and social relationships more generally via digital technology, social media and the conjunction of data/information harvesting and internalised forms of social control.

At the same time, *Black Mirror* episodes *self-critically reflect* upon their own status as products of the televisual medium and the inevitable complicity of the viewers/producers of such critiques of audiovisual culture. This is what we might call, extending the idea of film as philosophy (Mulhall), 'television in the condition of philosophy': reflecting upon their status as audiovisual works, their capacity for critique, as well as their ambiguous implication within the very systems of digital technological and social control that are in question.

Finally, these works of televisual speculative fiction are seductive: they enact an *aesthetic mimicry* of the sensuous allure of digital social media as part of their performative critique of the pernicious social effects of such media. They engage us via immersive narrative scenarios, emotionally charged audiovisual thought experiments, aesthetically imitative and interactive 'gaming' forms of cinematic presentation and reflective engagements with

their own complicity, as commercial television products, with the very system of digital/social media culture of which they are a part. *Black Mirror* thus offers performative, critical and reflexive modes of critique via the same medium that it exposes to scrutiny. Moving beyond a traditional critique of modern technology, *Black Mirror* thus performs a televisual disclosure of our technological mode of 'being-in-the-world' – a dark screen reflecting our ambivalent engagement with technologically-mediated social reality.

Conclusion: A Dialogue on the Future of Film-Philosophy

Chapter Outline

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In this book I have attempted to introduce contemporary approaches to the philosophy of film and to explore the idea of film-philosophy, focusing on the question of whether film can 'do philosophy', that is, contribute to our philosophical understanding via cinematic means. I have also examined the debate over 'film as philosophy', which I suggest has become a matter of exploring how cinema can accompany philosophy, engage in a mutually transformative encounter, guided by the idea of 'cinematic thinking'. In addition, I have explored the idea of cinematic thinking by focusing on three documentary/cinematic/televisual case studies, which offer aesthetically challenging instances of how we might approach cinema as a medium of philosophical and ethical experience. There are, nonetheless, three significant challenges for philosophy of film/film-philosophy arising from contemporary developments, which I have noted throughout this book. 1) The 'digital revolution' that has put the traditional conception of the medium ('film') into question; 2) cultural-political developments putting 'identity politics' (including

critiques of Eurocentrism, colonialism and so on), back at the centre of film-theoretical debate; 3) the challenge to extend the 'film as philosophy' debate into other domains of cinema (like documentary, television, animation and other digital media). In regard to 3), we would do better, I suggest, to recast the 'film as philosophy' debate in more pluralistic terms (concerning what counts as 'philosophy' as well as 'film'), certainly in more aesthetic terms, centred on the potential for cinema to serve as a medium of philosophical-ethical experience, which is what I am calling the idea of *cinematic thinking*.

I have attempted to deal with these issues in this book but recognise that there are critics who might remain unconvinced by the 'film as philosophy' idea, by the film-philosophy approaches I have explored, or by the idea of cinematic thinking.[1] Instead of rehearsing in summary form the arguments and debates I have examined throughout this book, I shall imagine a dialogue on the 'future of film-philosophy' in which these questions can be explored, albeit in an abbreviated manner, by a number of characters adopting diverse critical points of view. These are represented by a digital utopian (DU), a philosopher of film (PF), a film-philosopher (FP), an advocate of identity politics (IP) and a sceptical cultural theorist (CT). As in any philosophical dialogue, the aim is not necessarily to arrive at a definitive answer or ultimate conclusion but to deepen our understanding, clarify problems, conceptualise how to think through them and open up new perspectives to transform our horizons of thought.

1) The Digital Revolution and the Future of 'Film-Philosophy'

DU You have given us an illuminating overview of the new philosophical theories of film, including the 'film as philosophy' debate, but these theories still treat 'film' as though it were a living medium. How can we talk of 'film' – a concept that is both historically obsolete and technologically superseded – when we are currently in the digital age, and the medium of 'film' has been replaced by digital image-making practices? Cinema today is "filmed" using digital cameras, composed using digital editing software, routinely incorporates animation and CGI techniques and is subjected to a plethora of digital post-production processes. How can we still talk of 'film theory' when this medium, as Rodowick observes, has been deprived of its object? Much as I am intrigued by the 'new philosophies of film', they appear to be in the parlous position of

philosophising on an obsolete medium, and have barely begun to revise their 'ontology of film' in light of the shift to digital culture, let alone the emancipatory potentials of digital utopianism. Cavell follows Bazin in theorising a realist ontology of cinema, while Deleuze, who at least recognised the significance of digital images, remains focused on traditional forms of movement- and time-image cinema. Film-philosophers, from what I can see, remain sceptical or resistant towards the liberating possibilities of digital technology. What should philosophy of film should do in response to the digital revolution?

PF As a philosopher of film, someone trained in film theory but who embraced the 'new philosophies of film' (as an alternative to 'Grand Theory'), I agree that we need to take the digital revolution seriously. It is true that the majority of philosophers of film have paid scant attention to the challenges raised by the digital revolution, and do not give enough attention to how we should describe but also philosophise about 'film'. This is why many philosophers of film (like Carroll, Gaut, Plantinga and others) claim that we should talk of 'moving images' or 'screen stories' in order to loosen the grip of the old term 'film' on our thinking and shift to a more contemporary and expansive conception of this audiovisual medium. Others argue that we can continue to use the term 'cinema' in an expanded sense in order to encompass digital images, despite these technological transformations. Linguistic usage, moreover, is slow to change, and the historical origins or legacies of many terms do not preclude their acquisition of new meanings. Film production processes have changed dramatically, as has the circulation and consumption of cinema today (via multiple digital platforms involving different viewing practices from the old-fashioned shared yet solitary viewing experience in a darkened cinema theatre to watching streamed television shows on your mobile phone while commuting to work). Narrative cinema or screen stories are certainly produced and consumed differently, yet they remain aesthetically continuous with earlier forms of mainstream film (movies), despite obvious features such as the incorporation of CGI technology. There are new possibilities of the medium, thanks to the advent of digital images, but as Stephen Prince suggests, there is also a deep continuity with the older paradigm of 'film' narrative. Cinema remains an overwhelmingly narrative medium that has not changed appreciably. Reports of the death of film thanks to the digital image are greatly exaggerated.

FP I agree with PF about the need to rethink our assumptions in light of the digital revolution, and that we should give more attention to the ontology

of digital images (and examine how they differ from analogue images). It is also true that contemporary narrative cinema has expanded in its possibilities (in technical and production senses) but not radically altered in aesthetic terms (Plantinga's term 'screen stories' is an apt way of describing how narrative cinema has not changed dramatically despite the digital revolution).

As a film-philosopher, however, I want to say a few words defending the relevance of Cavell's and Deleuze's philosophical work on cinema in the digital age. Cavell, to be sure, does focus on what we might call the analogue phase of film history, and he did not write much concerning the shift to digital images and filmmaking practices. At the same time, his account of the medium refers to the aesthetic affordances and artistic possibilities that a new medium leaves for us to discover or invent, which is surely what we are seeing today in recent cinema (and animation). In the wake of the generalised 'image scepticism' that pervades contemporary culture, the problem of *scepticism*, whether epistemic or moral, has become more relevant than ever; Cavell's philosophical approach to cinema (or moving images, of whatever form) via the *problematique* of scepticism has taken on a new lease of life. The cultural scepticism towards truth, the claim of reason, artistic achievement, ethical responsibility and the role of art (including cinema) in response to these phenomena, makes it crucial for philosophy to respond to the ethical challenges raised by contemporary audiovisual culture.

There are also aesthetic reasons to defend Cavell's philosophical engagement with cinema. Some of the most interesting filmmakers today have explored the stylistic possibilities of digital images in dialogue with various filmic traditions in ways that suggest we need to think of the 'medium' in terms of aesthetic affordances and artistic possibilities rather than any virtual substrate, technological mediation or 'essential' defining properties. Whatever philosophical dimensions there are to contemporary digital cinema, we should also remain attentive to, and engaged with, the aesthetic possibilities of new digital media, including explorations of VR and their capacities to transform the medium (in Cavell's sense).

We can say much the same for Deleuze. Along with Carroll, he was one of the few philosophers to have recognised early the importance of the coming digital revolution, not to mention the importance of 'the brain' and body to philosophical engagement with film. His account of the 'shock to thought' that art can engender – how an affective, perceptual and bodily encounter with images can force us to think – is highly relevant to the challenges raised by digital media and related developments (VR technology, for example). Deleuze's insistence on the capacity of cinema to create images that solicit new ways of experiencing time, affect and thought that break with given

frames of representation and thereby provoke us to think (even philosophically) remains profoundly important in the digital age (consider his interest in experimental television, for example, in Beckett's television plays).[2] For these reasons, many film-philosophers have been thinking with Cavell and Deleuze, and against Cavell and Deleuze, to open up new forms of film-philosophical thinking in response to contemporary audiovisual culture. There is no reason why we should continue to rehearse Deleuze's own concepts or analyses, when it is more in the spirit of Deleuzian cine-philosophy to create new concepts in response to mutations in the medium(s) and the 'challenge of the digital' that is transforming the meaning and possibilities of cinema.

At the same time, I think we should be critical about the ambiguous potentials of digital and social media, and the profound technological transformation of social reality today. As Heidegger observed, the point is not to denounce technology as an evil force, nor uncritically celebrate it while remaining blind to its dangers, but rather to think through technology in order to find a more ethically freeing manner of inhabiting the technologically disclosed world. This is how philosophically oriented cinema and television (like *Black Mirror*) and ethical film-philosophy can contribute to a cultural politics. Such works offer not only shock to thought but also an invitation to explore the possibilities of cinema as a 'way of thinking'.

2) Philosophy of Film and Cultural Politics

IP What strikes me about both philosophers of film and film-philosophers is that they seem to predicate their philosophical engagement with cinema by passing over or marginalising cultural politics. Whether via the analytic-cognitivist critique of 'Grand Theory', Cavell's focus on 'scepticism' or Deleuze's focus on developing a Bergsonian (and Peircian) metaphysical and semiotic typology of movement- and time-images, philosophical engagement with cinema seems to sideline the more radical political traditions informing film or screen theory. As we know, the latter foregrounded the central role of ideology and the ways in which film theory could contribute to demystifying the medium, critiquing capitalism and exposing the mechanisms of power that construct dominant and subordinate subject positions according to the axes of class, gender and so on. Film theorists today are renewing these debates in light of the return to 'identity politics' and hence refocusing their

attention on gender, 'race' and the critique of coloniality, Eurocentrism, white supremacy, to name some key fronts in what, for better or worse, used to be called the 'culture wars'. Would you not say that philosophers of film/film-philosophers should be focusing more on identity politics or at least the ways in which ideology remains important in contemporary cinema? Does doing 'philosophy of film/film-philosophy' have to preclude cultural politics?

PF The critique of 'Grand Theory' did come about during a volatile period in film studies, which at times did take on a 'culture wars' aspect, although the polemics, from memory, seemed to go in both directions (think of the lively exchanges between Heath and Carroll). Still, there is a misconception today that analytic-cognitivst film theory is 'apolitical' or unconcerned with social and political issues, or somehow blind to ideology. Much depends on what one means by 'politics' here, which has many meanings in contemporary debates (what film and cultural theorists mean by 'politics' in an expanded sense may be quite different from what political philosophers, let alone political theorists, mean by the term). Early volumes by analytic-cognitivist theorists (like Allen and Smith 1997) included discussions of ideology, subjectivity and politics (including critiques of the 'Brechtian' paradigm in film theory). This has not remained a focus of analytic cognitivist approaches, to be sure, but that is not to say we cannot gain anything from these approaches for understanding film's ideological dimensions. Contemporary cognitivists, especially pluralists, have contributed to understanding affect and emotional engagement with film (see Plantinga 2018). This seems to me a key component in how ideology gets a grip on individual (and group) subjectivity (not for nothing do we talk today of the 'politics of fear' in regard to the alt-right, the insidious appeal of 'fake news' or the affective and cognitive influence of conspiracy theories in politics). This means that we need to understand how audiovisual media manage to capture attention, channel and direct affect and emotion, and shift attitudes and beliefs in ways that are ethically and politically significant. Audiovisual propaganda does not work by appealing to the 'unforced force of the better argument' (to use Habermas' phrase) but by the force of images, the power of affect, the links between emotion and cognition, between perception, emotion and action. That is one way that philosophy of cinema – including cognitivist film theory – can contribute to our understanding of ethical, political and ideological concerns.

FP I agree that we do need to think through cinema in relation to its ethical, political and ideological dimensions, and that this remains a

challenge for contemporary film-philosophy. That is why I made the point a moment ago about how philosophy can contribute to cultural politics in relation to cinema. I think we need to be careful, though, not to set up a false opposition between 'philosophical' engagement with cinema and 'political' forms of theory with an explicitly 'activist' orientation. I think you can see this with Cavell and Deleuze, for example, whose work has always had a strongly ethical orientation, and implicit political dimension, which both remain closely integrated with their respective philosophical concerns. Think of Cavell's exploration of moral perfectionism and his focus on the conditions of democratic life, or his reflections (in *Cities of Words*) on how popular cinema can engage traditions of political philosophy in narrative terms. It is true that his attention is directed towards American cinema (and politics) and that there is much to be said here concerning gender, 'race' and other aspects of identity politics. Cavell always argued that we need to maintain an openness to conversation and dialogue with others as paramount to any philosophical engagement with film (lest we revert to a bellicose and moralising paradigm of discursive 'warfare' in which my interlocutor is an evil Other to be denounced rather than a partner in dialogue from whom I might learn).

Deleuze too has a strongly ethical focus in his *Cinema* books, from his insistence that cinema has a creative capacity to express 'thought' relevant to the contemporary world to his engagement with cinema as a response to nihilism and means of providing 'reasons to believe in this world'. There is also Deleuze's more explicitly political exploration of 'minor cinema', with its political focus on marginalised, subjugated and/or colonised peoples, who find in their 'impossible' conditions of subjugation the tools to create cinema with the potential for creating new modes of existence while critically resisting the 'intolerable' status quo imposed by different forms of social and cultural domination. And then there are Deleuze's remarks on the 'society of control', which resonate powerfully today and have been taken up by filmmakers and theorists concerned with the dangers posed by the rise of what Zuboff calls 'surveillance capitalism' (think of *Black Mirror*, for example).

I am not saying that these two thinkers have all the answers, but their responses to some of the philosophical, ethical and political questions raised by cinema are, to my mind, worth the time (of your life) to reflect upon and understand. Many contemporary film-philosophers are exploring, in a critical and creative manner, how to move beyond Deleuze's own thinking, drawing on the conceptual tools we might find in his work in order to

respond to the cultural-political challenges we face in our globalised world. Again, we can take our cue from filmmakers – in a world of global cinemas, as Martin-Jones puts it – whose aesthetically complex and politically committed works provoke (and express) thought in ways that are both philosophically productive and ethico-politically resistant. When it comes to 'politicising' film-philosophy, we should let 'a thousand flowers bloom', to use an old slogan. We should welcome a plurality of philosophical perspectives that take up whatever concepts or philosophical approaches might help us engage with contemporary cultural politics but in ways that remain open and constructive, creative and critical, rather than being dogmatic, sectarian or doctrinaire.

That said, I would add that we should also avoid falling into the trap of reductively 'instrumentalising' cinema as no more than a vehicle for ideology. This is the case whether we are critiquing the ethical, cultural, 'racial' or political biases of a particular work, or promoting the moral-pedagogical – or 'consciousness-raising', to use an old-fashioned term – benefits of particular marginalised, radical or overtly cultural-political works. The interplay, which includes both confluences and clashes, between aesthetic and ethico-political dimensions of cinema and television remains an irreducible feature of their aesthetic complexity and expression of meaning – a point that contemporary film-philosophers would be wise to acknowledge.

3) Cinematic Thinking: Philosophical Cherry-Picking or Transformative Encounter?

CT These are fine words from you both, and I applaud the sentiment behind them; but many philosophers still have doubts about the 'bold' or strong versions of the 'film as philosophy' thesis. It is difficult but not impossible to show how cinematic works can contribute in an original manner to philosophical or ethical understanding (or even to political change) but I do not see how we can make such bold claims without erasing the distinction between philosophy and film – or indeed philosophy and art – in ways that are implausible or questionable. Films do not, in a philosophical sense, offer arguments, or give reasons, or make theoretical generalisations, although I do grant that they can be regarded as 'thought experiments' or complex examples for further philosophical reflection. But this is to admit only the 'moderate'

version of the 'film as philosophy' thesis, which still leaves the 'bold' version in abeyance.

I do not wish to rehearse those arguments again here but would like to raise a related issue, which chimes with DU's question: why do philosophers of film/film-philosophy tend to focus on narrative film (whether popular, 'world' or 'arthouse') rather than other forms of cinema (like documentary) or, for that matter, television? The author has made some initial forays in these directions, but the question remains: have philosophers of film/film-philosophers focused on particular kinds of narrative film in order to 'cherry pick' examples that would fit or confirm the 'film as philosophy' thesis? Is this not a question-begging form of argument (what Wartenberg called the 'imposition objection'), recalling the very flaw for which 'Grand Theorists' were ruthlessly criticised? Do we really need philosophy in order to engage with cinema? What can philosophy add to our cultural understanding of film and other audiovisual media?

PF These are important questions getting to the heart of what philosophers think they are doing when they engage with cinema. As you note, the 'moderate' version of the 'film as philosophy' thesis is now widely accepted, even among erstwhile critics of this approach. The 'bold' version, of course, is still controversial, with debate continuing as to its coherence and plausibility. One way we can defend the idea of film contributing to philosophical understanding is via the cinematic *experience* we can have that may be conducive to imaginative reordering of beliefs, questioning of assumptions, or shifting of perspectives. Cinema does not generally introduce radically new ideas or profoundly re-educate (or, for that matter, manipulate) viewers. But it can remind us of what we (think we) know, it can clarify but also probe or query our intuitions and beliefs, and it can enable us to reorder and refine our thinking (particularly concerning moral beliefs and attitudes) in ways that are philosophically significant and cognitively productive (this is what contemporary philosophers call *aesthetic cognitivism*). These forms of affective and cognitive experience – essential, for example, in engaging with cinematic thought experiments – may be one way of explaining how films can be philosophical in ways specific to the medium (and thus offer support for the 'bold' version of the 'film as philosophy' thesis).

FP These criticisms of philosophical approaches to cinema are understandable but also misplaced. I can only agree with PF's responses regarding the potential for cinema to enhance, refine and extend our

philosophical and ethical understanding. We can have philosophical and ethical experiences with cinema. If film-philosophers are responding to the aesthetic, moral and philosophical experiences that certain films can elicit, then it is not surprising that they appear to 'cherry pick' films – as the author has done in this book – that are conducive to both eliciting and expressing this kind of philosophical and ethical engagement. From this point of view, film-philosophers are not engaging in a questionable 'imposition' of their views or frameworks on film; rather, they are responding, in a conceptual manner, to the varieties of philosophical and ethical experience that cinema can make possible. My suggestion, then, is that perhaps we should shift the ground and terms of the debate, focusing more on *cinema as a philosophical and ethical experience*.[3] This is one way of recasting what cinema can do: both express and elicit what we might call experiences of cinematic thinking, which depend upon the ways in which aesthetic, imaginative and emotional engagement with cinematic works can open up new paths for thinking, perhaps even new ways of being.

For these reasons I think we need to recall that audiovisual works of art (like all art) not only offer experiences that are pleasurable and fascinating, wondrous and absorbing, disturbing and arousing. They can also both provoke and express thought in ways that force us to think and feel outside our habitual routines and stereotypical regimes. Cinema can reveal and express the world anew, offering ways of thinking and feeling that are urgently required in our troubled and troubling world. It may even offer us experiences with ethically transformative power. If that sounds like a speculative promissory note, which it doubtless is, all I can say is that it recalls one of the most admirable ways of thinking about art and beauty – I mean the idea that cinema, like beauty, offers us 'only the promise of happiness'.

Notes

Introduction

1. These are contested terms. Nonetheless, film theory that opposes itself to the 'old' paradigm (psychoanalytic, semiotic, 'Continental'), has a set of shared problems, arguments and debates, and involves authors who explicitly discuss each other's work, can be called a 'movement' with shared views of what comprises 'philosophy of film'. The term 'analytic-cognitivist' (or 'cognitive-analytic') approach has also been used by other film theorists, including Plantinga (2002, 2009), who defined the cognitivist approach more generally as 'committed to the study of human psychology using the methods of contemporary psychology and analytic philosophy' (2002: 21), and remarked that 'much of what has been called "cognitivist" film studies is only cognitivist in a broad sense, and could just as well be called "analytic"' (2002: 15). See also Elsaesser's discussion of the 'film as philosophy' debate, which explicitly discusses the analytic-cognitivist approach (2019: 23–24).
2. I use the terms 'film', 'cinema' and 'moving images' interchangeably throughout this book, mindful of the terminological subtleties attending these different terms, and the need to acknowledge the important shift introduced by the advent of digital images (see Carroll 2008; Gaut 2012; McGregor 2013).
3. The earliest volumes published using this now ubiquitous title were those by Mulhall (2002, 2008), Read and Goodenough (2005), Smith and Wartenberg (2006) and Wartenberg (2007). The analytic-cognitivist turn was announced even earlier with volumes by Bordwell and Carroll (1996) and Allen and Smith (1997). See also the important book by Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy* (2006) and Carel and Tuck's influential volume, *New Takes on Film-Philosophy* (2011). For authoritative topical overviews of philosophical work on cinema, see Livingston and Plantinga (2009); for more author-based philosophical approaches, see Colman (2009) and the monumental recent volume edited by Carroll, di Summa and Loht (2019). Other recent volumes on film as philosophy with a more 'Continental' slant include Herzogenrath (2017), Rawls, Neiva and Gouveia (2019) and Elsaesser (2019), who added a new twist on the theme with his study on 'film as thought experiment'.

4. See Wartenberg (2015 [2004]), for a fine overview and analysis of recent work in this field. See also Falzon (2013) for a helpful critical discussion of debates concerning 'philosophy through film' that I address in Chapter 8.
5. A sample of key works would include Bordwell (1989), Cavell (1979 [1971], 1981, 1996), Carroll (1988a, 1988b), Currie (1995), M. Smith (1995), Bordwell and Carroll (1996), Allen and Smith (1997), Plantinga and G. M. Smith (1999).
6. See Sinnerbrink (2019a, 2019b) for longer discussions of 'film as philosophy' and 'post-structuralism and film' respectively.
7. I address Rodowick's contribution to film-philosophy at greater length in Chapter 8.
8. See Gaut (2010: 2–6) and Smith (2010) for useful summaries of this analytic-cognitivist turn.
9. Ian Jarvie (1987) was one of the pioneers of the new philosophy of film, publishing articles on Bergman's films in 1959 and the early 1960s and various articles on film and philosophy throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to Cavell's *The World Viewed* (1971, first edition), important articles appeared in the 1970s by Alexander Sesonke (1973, 1974) and Francis Sparshott (1975, 1985). Bruce Kawin's *Mindscreen* (1978) should also be mentioned as an early contribution to the field.
10. See Rafe McGregor's excellent discussion (2017) of Murray Smith's *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* and the idea of a romantic film-philosophy or 'cinematic romanticism' that would bring together these two approaches.
11. The two texts that catalysed this uptake, in my opinion, are Rodowick's *Gilles Deleuze's Time-Machine* (1997) and Gregory Flaxman's edited volume, *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema* (2000).
12. My thanks to Fiona Jenkins and Greg Tuck for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

Chapter 1

1. Carroll defines 'Theory' as 'a classy continental number, centrally composed of elements of Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, and Roland Barthes, often with optional features derived, often incongruously, from Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Pierre Bourdieu, Gilles Deleuze, and (*maybe* sometimes) Jacques Derrida, along with contributions from French cinéphiles like Christian Metz, Raymond Bellour, and Jean-Louis Baudry, although generally filtered, albeit with a difference, through exegetes like Stephen Heath, Kaja Silverman, and Teresa de Lauretis' (1996: 37).

2. See also Carroll's companion book to this one (1988b).
3. It is intriguing that Carroll here cites Cavell as a 'classical film theorist' whereas I would classify him as a philosopher of film and, more precisely, as a film-philosopher.
4. V. F. Perkins had already made this criticism in 1972: '[Film theory] emerged radically deformed and incapable of useful growth. It could develop only as a sterile orthodoxy, a body of rules and prescriptions whose common features include internal contradiction and irrelevance to critical discussion of actual movies' (1972: 11). Perkins' words are echoed in more recent criticisms of the sterile orthodoxy that film theory has become (see Frampton 2006: 169–182).
5. Allen and Smith, for example, assert that 'Continental' philosophers such as Theodor Adorno, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault have all attempted to demonstrate 'the impossibility of knowledge', and have apparently 'embraced this contradiction as *the* defining feature of philosophy and the only legitimate path that philosophy can take in response to modernity' (Allen and Smith 1997: 10). Little argumentative or textual evidence is provided, however, to support such hyperbolic claims, which are sometimes uncritically repeated in some critiques of 'Grand Theory' (see, for example, M. Smith 2010).
6. See Slugan (2019) for an excellent detailed study of Carroll's philosophy of film.
7. See Sobchack (2011) for a fascinating discussion of Derek Jarman's *Blue* from a phenomenological perspective.
8. This is the basis of Carroll's critique of Currie's account of the filmic medium, which is unable to deal with avant-gardist and experimental cinema.
9. A striking example would be Torben Grodal's bioculturalist analyses of action film, pornography or romance genres as 'illustrating' the biologically grounded propensity, derived from our evolutionary history, for men to prefer sex and violence and women to prefer romance and child-nurturing narratives (2009: 56–78). Grodal assumes that culture reflects biological foundations, much like 'vulgar' Marxists assumed that it reflected the 'economic base'.
10. For a critique of the 'naturalistic' turn in film theory and defence of a 'philosophy of the humanities' see Rodowick (2007a, 2007b, 2014, 2015). I discuss in Chapter 8 Rodowick's contribution to contemporary film-philosophy, a neo-Deleuzian/neo-Cavellian aesthetic-ethical 'philosophy of the humanities'.
11. An exception here is Joseph D. Anderson's work (1996), which emphasised 'ecological' cognitive theory and the importance of our cognitive-practical engagement with the 'affordances' of our environment.

Chapter 2

1. See David Lynch's remarks on the 'end of film' (2006: 149–150).
2. Necessary conditions are those which something must have in order to count as a case of X; sufficient conditions are those which, if possessed jointly, ensure that something is X. Being male is a necessary condition of being a bachelor but not a sufficient one (there are married men); whereas being male and unmarried is a sufficient condition of being a bachelor.
3. This of course is a different sense of 'intentionality' than that used in phenomenology and philosophy of mind, according to which 'intentionality' refers to the directedness of consciousness.
4. It is true that I cannot orient myself on the basis of the image, but then that is also true of a microscopic or telescopic image. Imagine attending a screening of Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002) within St Petersburg's famous Hermitage museum; here I would have phenomenological access to the profilmic space but not to the historical-cinematic 'Russian' world of the film. Although we obviously cannot orient ourselves towards the fictional world of the film, Carroll's insistence on the impossibility, 'save in freak circumstances' of orienting ourselves towards any profilmic space we view on screen seems overstated.
5. Brian de Palma's *Body Double* (1984), Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Love* (1988) and Jacques Audiard's *Read My Lips* [*Sur mes lèvres*] (2001) are excellent examples of this kind of cinematic use of space, which depends upon our ability to orient ourselves within the diegetic world inhabited by the characters.
6. I owe this example to Jean-Philippe Deranty.
7. The flicker fusion threshold is the frequency at which all flicker from an intermittent light source is perceived to disappear (for us, approximately 16 Hertz); cinema projectors typically operate at 24 Hertz (24 frames per second), television monitors at 50 or 60 Hertz and so on.
8. An account that, charitably interpreted, is not far off the 'flicker effect'.
9. As Carroll notes, even animals appear to perceive movement in moving images in the same way that human beings do (2008: 88–89).
10. Or when a film interrupts our ordinary perception (or expectation) of movement and raises explicitly the question of movement and its relationship with the (moving) image, as is the case with Marker's *La jetée*.
11. See Sinnerbrink (2009) for a criticism of Carroll's (1988c) reading of Münsterberg, and his related critique of the film/mind analogy, which is best understood as an aesthetic analogy rather than an epistemic claim.
12. Carroll criticises the film/mind analogy (1988c), arguing that comparing film to the mind is unhelpful because we know more about film than the mind, so the logic of analogy fails to be illuminating in the right way. On

the other hand, comparing the mind to film – as Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl and Bernard Stiegler have done – can be illuminating, offering new ways of thinking about the mind.

13. See also discussions of film as art by Haig Khatchadourian (1975), Jesse Prinz (2010) and Murray Smith (2006).
14. Cf. 'The electronic image, that is, the tele and video image, the numerical [digital – R. S.] image coming into being, either had to transform cinema or to replace it, to mark its death' (Deleuze 1989: 265).
15. Cf. 'The brain is unity. The brain is the screen. I don't believe that linguistics and psychoanalysis offer a great deal to the cinema. On the contrary, the biology of the brain – molecular biology – does. Thought is molecular. Molecular speeds make up the slow beings that we are. . . The circuits and linkages of the brain don't pre-exist the stimuli, corpuscles, and particles that trace them. . . Cinema, precisely because it puts the image in motion, or rather endows the image with self-motion, never stops tracing the circuits of the brain' (Deleuze 2000: 366).
16. We should note here the rise of new media theory and philosophy of new media that has provided a rich field on engagement with digital media technologies. See Cubitt (2014), Hansen (2004), Manovich (2001).
17. Timothy H. O'Sullivan, 'Death on a Misty Morning' [Photograph], Available online: www.alamy.com/stock-photo-american-civil-war-death-on-a-misty-morning-photographed-on-the-field-57287908.html (accessed 1 June 2021).
18. My thanks go to Havi Carel for her helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

Chapter 3

1. See, for example, Oliver Sacks' (1986), 'The Lost Mariner', which features a character by the name of Jimmie G., who lost the ability to form short-term memories, hence still believes that it is 1945.
2. I owe this point to Jane Stadler.
3. In discussing Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), for example, Gaut comments on the film's (Akerman's) use of a static camera as commenting on the trapped existence of the heroine: 'For Akerman, employing a stationary camera was a matter of choice, whereas for the Lumiére brothers it was not' (2010: 40). Gaut's comment certainly reads like the ascription of authorial intention and artistic responsibility to Akerman as solo author (not to mention the Lumiére brothers).
4. One also has to acknowledge the role of the film industry in this regard, for which the author/director has become another means of marketing a

certain 'brand'; the advent of DVD extras, moreover, has added to the prestige of the auteur, offering interviews and other authorial insights that promise to reveal the inner meaning of the film. My thanks to Jane Stadler for this point.

5. One could argue that the authorship for *The Fog of War* is jointly shared with former Secretary of State Robert McNamara, whose remarkable autobiographical reflections on his life and on American politics provide the film's fascinating subject-matter.
6. As Frampton points out (2006: 170–174), the fact that it is easy to conflate critical-technical discourse with narrative description continues to bedevil theoretical discussions of film.
7. *The Sixth Sense*, which features Shyamalan as writer/director, is a straightforward case. Films with different screenwriters and directors, however, could presumably also have a single implied author imputed to them, even if this implied authorship is divided between different actual authors who collaborated in the making of the film.
8. I restrict myself here to digital interactive media, with some reflections on VR, rather than focusing on computer gaming, which is a specialised field of inquiry in its own right (see Aarseth 2007; Bogost 2011; Crogan 2011; Gaut 2009; Grodal 2003, 2009; Kania 2018; McIver Lopes 2010; Robson and Tavinor 2018; Tavinor 2009; Thompson-Jones 2015).
9. See Smuts (2009a) for a detailed analysis of different senses of 'interactivity', a proposed definition of interactivity (as 'interacting with'), and critiques of prevailing theories of interactivity.
10. See Daniel 2018 for a discussion of the idea of VR as a medium of ethical experience, focusing on immersive VR documentary dealing with indigenous experience in Australia. See also Ordóñez Angulo (2017) for a discussion of the aesthetic and ethical affordances of Gonzalez Iñárittu's interactive VR installation work *Carne y Arena* [*Flesh and Sand*] (2017) as a 'transformative' VR work that solicits both cognitive and affective-perceptual empathy with a profound potential for transforming our moral horizons.

Chapter 4

1. This is Bordwell's main complaint against what he derisively calls 'Interpretation Inc' (1989b: 21–29), and the motivation for proposing his alternative model of film analysis, namely 'historical poetics'.
2. The famous shots of Kane speechifying in front of the campaign poster of his grotesquely exaggerated face cannot help but recall (given the wartime context) a certain proximity to fascist aesthetics.

3. As Bordwell and other critics point out, Ozu recast the materials of post-war Japanese Meiji culture, 'mediated by such cinematic factors as Hollywood norms, Japanese cinema's "decorative classicism", and the practices of a commercial film industry' (Bordwell 1988b: 30). The point is that one should not immediately assume that Ozu's famous use of low-angle shots has an obviously 'traditional' cultural meaning.
4. Carroll uses the nauseating example of Dario Argento's *Phenomena* (*Creepers*) (1985): 'As the heroine thrashes about in the pool – full of decomposing bodies, sewerage, and insect larvae – and quaffs down viscous gobs of liquidy, brownish stuff, one's feeling of nausea is surely not quasi-nausea nor pretend disgust; it is indiscernible from real disgust' (1990: 78).
5. Contra Plantinga, however, consider the new French 'cinema of extremity', which includes films such as Catherine Breillat's *Romance* (1999), Claire Denis' *Trouble Every Day* (2001), Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (2002), Breillat's *Anatomy of Hell* (2004) and so on. See Quandt (2004) and Palmer (2006) for contrasting discussions of this trend, which began to subside once we entered the 2010s (most likely due to ideological shifts in prevailing moral and cultural-political sensibilities applied to cinematic representations of sex and violence).
6. A keen gamer, however, might find *Inception*'s lack of 'character engagement' paradoxically engaging precisely because it simulates a computer game, thus allowing the viewer to identify with 'Cobb' in a manner similar to his or her own gaming avatar. I owe this point to Tarja Laine.
7. Interestingly, this Mexican song, written by Tomas Mendez, and introduced by Lola Betran in a film of the same name, also appears in Robert Aldrich's Western *The Last Sunset* (1961) and in Wong Kar-wai's queer love story, *Happy Together/Buenos Aires Affair* (1997).
8. My thanks go to Tarja Laine and Jane Stadler for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

Chapter 5

1. Peritore (1977) was among the first to introduce descriptive phenomenology as a method for film studies, although his plea for an application of the Husserlian epoche and method of eidetic reduction to the descriptive analysis of film experience fell on deaf ears (or blind eyes).
2. Although published in 1990, Tomasulo notes that it had been in preparation for five years, so from the mid-1980s. He mentions the forthcoming books by Casebier and Sobchack, and outlines many of the

themes to which phenomenology can contribute that still concern us today (subjectivity, spectatorship, gender, aesthetic experience and the ontological challenge of television and new media).

3. As Tomasulo urged over 30 years ago: 'Attention needs to be directed away from the strain of affective, intuitive, and psychological phenomenology that has become the *sine qua non* in film circles (Bazin, Metz, Cavell, Linden, Andrew) and redirected toward the pure phenomenology of consciousness originally posited by Husserl' (1988: 20, quoted in Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich 2016: 2). Although Casebier took up this challenge, it was Merleau-Ponty who became the philosophical source par excellence for contemporary film-phenomenology (thanks to the work of Vivian Sobchack).
4. As Yacavone (2016) argues, much contemporary film-phenomenology adapts Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of embodied perception but ignores the tradition of phenomenological aesthetics and its exploration of the phenomenology of cinematic (aesthetic) experience.
5. Don Idhe's phenomenological work is another important source and influence, as is evident in the extensive citations of his work in Sobchack's discussion of the 'film's body' in Chapter 3. So too is the contribution of Sobchack's supervisor Richard L. Lanigan. Heidegger and Mikel Dufrenne are other important philosophical/phenomenological reference points, as is Iris Marion Young's phenomenological version of 'corporeal feminism'.
6. This opposition recalls that between realism and idealism in philosophy: either we have direct perceptual access to reality (realism), or our experience is always already mediated by representations, concepts etc. (idealism).
7. See Koivunen (2015) for an overview of the turn to affect in feminist film theory.
8. Cf. 'In *The Address of the Eye* I was focused on our vision as embodied and entailing all our senses. For me, the big realisation was that a film also sees (and hears) and that seeing (and hearing) are always situated somewhere. Thus, I had to deal with the material substrate of that offscreen presence. To just call it "the camera" seemed to me too easily reducible to much less than it was. And it was also other than the filmmaker. The film's seeing and hearing is consciously moving and connecting things together onscreen for a purpose while inhabiting space and time. The apparatus called "the camera" does not "inhabit" anything. Borrowing upon Richard Zaner's work, the term "body" is thus meant not only to assert a film's material status but also its basic functions. Moreover, bodies are not necessarily anthropomorphic. These are the reasons why the film's body is not a metaphor' (Sobchack quoted in Hanich 2017).
9. A point already made by Hugo Münsterberg in his pioneering work, *The Photoplay* (1916).

10. We cannot ordinarily perceive many things that a camera can capture and a film can depict (with respect to point of view, magnification, scale, context, timeframe, motion speed etc.); we do not experience the world as having cuts, see objects in close-up, cut between spatial and temporal frames, have literal flashbacks etc. As Sobchack remarks of *The Lady in the Lake*, 'the film is narrated almost exclusively through the subjective perception of its protagonist Philip Marlowe, but the film does not see exactly as a human sees and it was necessary to point out the differences' (Sobchack quoted in Hanich 2017).
11. In response to Julian Hanich putting this criticism to Sobchack, namely that the 'film body' is a conceptual imposition, rather than a phenomenological derivation from experience, Sobchack claims that she does not impose the concept but arrives at it in the course of a phenomenological investigation of the cinematic experience (2017). Her defence, however, supports my claim that there is an irreducibly 'subjective' (anthropocentric) horizon presupposed by all phenomenological analyses, including her analysis of the film body. Indeed, given that cinema is a human artefact, and that films are intentional works directed at human recipients embedded within cultural lifeworlds, what other 'horizon of meaning' could there possibly be?
12. Although the flaws of *Lady in the Lake* are well known, there are more recent examples of cinematic experiments in direct embodied point of view that are far more successful (e.g., Schnabel's *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007) and Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void* (2009)). These more recent examples clearly signal the transition to an embodied character point of view and at the same time make use of 'free indirect' camera/narrative point of view in contrast to insisting on a monologically 'embodied' point of view attributable to one particular character.
13. As with Sobchack, the very idea of a 'filmind' with an animating intentionality is *eo ipso* modelled on the (phenomenological) model of intentional (human) consciousness, hence Frampton cannot simply dismiss charges of 'anthropocentrism' since it is hard to imagine any other model of 'mindedness' that could serve as a paradigm for thinking.
14. Without any specific examination of what a film (like Haneke's *The Piano Teach*er, for example, see 2006: 143) enables us to think (concerning, say, the relationship between art and desire, violence and subjectivity, cinema spectatorship and moral complicity), we are left with only a sensuous description and minimalist hermeneutic concerning the formal composition of various image sequences.
15. See Frampton's (2008) replies to these and other criticisms of his book, *Filmosophy*.

16. As Hanich remarks (2015: 116), although there are brilliant analyses of texts like Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and Freud's 'Inhibition, Symptom, Anxiety', Brinkema's book devotes remarkably little attention to detailed and extended film analyses that would provide the appropriate hermeneutic evidence to fulfil her aim of 'reclaiming form for film studies'.
17. See De Roo (2019) and B. Martin (2019) for two fine examples of how these approaches can be combined in ways that relate aesthetic and ethical dimensions of cinema.

Chapter 6

1. Although both Deleuze and Cavell can be understood as film-philosophers, in what follows I refer to Deleuze's approach as cine-philosophy to signal its difference from traditional 'philosophy of film' approaches, but more specifically to distinguish it from Cavell's 'film and philosophy' (or film-philosophy) approach (which I discuss next chapter).
2. See Deamer (2016) for comprehensive introductions to Deleuze's film-philosophy from philosophical, semiotic and cinematic perspectives.
3. I cite these as authored by Bergson/Deleuze since Deleuze deploys an idiosyncratic and contestable interpretation of Bergson. See Mullarkey for a critique (2009: 97–100).
4. In the case of digital images, as Mullarkey points out, Bergson's critique would refer to screen refresh rates rather than frame projection rates, with 'the apparent movement of the cinema images being parasitic upon real physical movement existing elsewhere (ultimately, of whatever generates the power for an electrical device . . .)' (2009: 236).
5. See McGregor (2018) for a comprehensive defence of 'anti-illusionism' as a persuasive version of cinematic realism.
6. I discuss the first two versions of the crisis of the action-image in what follows, and return to the third version in a later subsection ('Deleuze's Existential Imperative: Belief in the World').
7. Cf. 'But the essence of cinema – which is not the majority of films – has thought as its higher purpose, nothing but thought and its functioning' (Deleuze 1989: 168).
8. Rodowick defines aberrant movements in terms of irrational movements (with reference to irrational cuts) using the definition of rational versus irrational planes as an analogy (see Rodowick 1997: 18–27).
9. As Rodowick notes (1997), Deleuze's rather traditional account of the history of cinema is hampered by his assumptions concerning the primitive character of early cinema, a point that has been discussed critically by Viegas (2016).

10. I take this to refer not only to the post-revolutionary disappointments experienced after WWII but to the disappointed expectations of radical social transformation following the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s.
11. Kovács (2000) claims that Deleuze's *Cinema* books, with their historical break between movement-image and time-image cinema, should be read as a cinematic version of the history of thought.
12. Rancière makes the same point about Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (2006: 5).
13. A number of Deleuzian film theorists have also questioned Deleuze's historical and aesthetic assumptions about cinema, and have taken Deleuzian film-philosophy into new theoretical territory (see Brown 2013a; Del Rio 2012; Flaxman 2012; Marks 2000, 2002; Martin-Jones 2006, 2011, 2019; Pisters 2003, 2012; Rodowick 2010; Vaughan 2013).

Chapter 7

1. See LaRocca's (2020) excellent collection of philosophical essays on Cavell and cinema.
2. See Mulhall (1999) for a fine discussion of Cavell, scepticism and film. See Klevan (2011) for an exemplary engagement with Cavell and philosophical film criticism.
3. Deleuze makes a very similar point concerning the 'frame' in his discussion of the movement-image (1986: 12–18).
4. This is why cinematic remakes are usually disappointing. It is impossible to substitute one actor for another when we are dealing with an iconic actor/character combination (like Vince Vaughn as Norman Bates in Gus Van Sant's shot-for-shot remake of *Psycho* (1998)).
5. See Klevan (2005) for an original Cavellian-inspired engagement with screen performance.
6. See Trahair (2007) for a fine film-philosophical discussion of Keaton's cinematic philosophy of comedy.
7. Irving Singer (2008) has elaborated, in elegant Cavellian fashion, this important aspect of film as a practice of cinematic mythmaking.
8. Haynes asked Blanchett and Mara to read Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* in order to prepare for their roles as Carol and Therese. See White (2015) for a discussion of the significance of Barthes' text for the ways in which the love relationship is explored in the film.
9. Therese's own ambivalence about how her relationship with Carol may or may not fit within the subcultural New York lesbian community is signaled in the record store scene where two older lesbians, in mannish

dress, stare pointedly at Therese, who also seems unsure how to respond to their gaze. That she and Carol do not fit into this subcultural world, let alone the 'straight' world, only adds to the tragic pressure to which their perfectionist romance is subjected.

10. The film's circular structure – commencing with a restaurant scene in which their relationship hangs in the balance, recounting the story of their relationship and how they reached that point, and reprising the same scene having traversed the story and realised the pathos and gravity of their exchange – recalls *Brief Encounter* in structure, mood and style. *Carol*, however, also departs from the film in leaving open the possibility of Carol and Therese renewing their romance on a more equal and hopeful basis.
11. Cf. 'It requires belief, relation to one's past, conviction that one's words and conduct express oneself, that they say what one means, and that what one means is enough to say' (Cavell 1979: 62).
12. Mullarkey criticises Deleuze for using film examples 'as stand-ins for concepts' (2009: 108).

Chapter 8

1. In the third edition of *On Film*, Mulhall (2016) extends his reflections on contemporary cinematic franchises with additional chapters on the Jason Bourne films, the fourth *Mission: Impossible* movie, J. J. Abrams' *Star Trek* and *Star Trek: Into Darkness*, and Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* (which returns us to the *Alien* universe he introduced in 1979). These philosophical reflections expand on central problems discussed in the earlier editions of *On Film*, including the question of genre (science fiction and thriller), reflections on the impact of digital technology on cinema as a medium (and its relation to television), and the significance of sequeldom in the context of mainstream contemporary cinema.
2. As Joshua Shaw points out (2009), this is Julian Baggini's (2003) main criticism of Mulhall's *On Film*: not that films cannot philosophise (Baggini mentions that philosophers' favourite, Kurosawa's *Rashomon*) but that the *Alien* films do not.
3. See, for example, the *Philosophy Now* recording of 'Interview with Slavoj Žižek' (2017) www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka8S0vN73u4. Strictly speaking, the philosophy in this case would be occurring in the context of the interview situation, rather than anything cinematic, which raises the question to what extent media interviews, whether written or filmed, can serve as media of philosophical expression. I thank Tom Wartenberg for alerting me to this point.

4. In Chapter 10 I shall discuss precisely such an attempt in the case of two documentaries focused on the life and thought of controversial French philosopher Jacques Derrida.
5. See Austin's discussion in *Sense and Sensibilia* of 'trouser words', which refer to the dominant partner in conceptually paired terms (where the subordinate term is presumably a 'skirt word'). The obvious sexism of the metaphor carries over, I suggest, in many discussions of the relationship between film and philosophy.
6. Bergman writes in a 1957 Preface to the English translation of the screenplay of *Wild Strawberries* (1957): 'Philosophically, there is a book which was a tremendous experience for me: Eino Kaila's *Psychology of the Personality*. His thesis that man lives strictly according to his needs – negative and positive – was shattering to me, but terribly true. And I built on this ground' (quoted in Livingston 2009b: 562).
7. Smuts overlooks the possibility that *The Matrix* does offer this kind of demonstration within the narrative itself; the viewer undergoes the kind of sceptical experience of radical uncertainty precisely by watching and engaging with the film's fictional simulation of worlds (within the film). From this point of view, the philosopher is providing a commentary on something that the film does cinematically, rather than an interpretation that supplies a demonstrative element absent from the film.
8. Shaw also discusses this sequence along similar lines (2008: 9–10).
9. In his most recent response, Livingston (2019) queries Smuts' claim to have found a counterexample (the 'God and Country' sequence from *October*) that would satisfy the conditions required for a cinematic work to fulfil the 'bold' version of the film as philosophy thesis. Livingston rejects this claim, arguing that Smuts weakens the 'bold' claim by not requiring the film to communicate a philosophical argument by exclusively cinematic means, that is, by using features that are 'unique' to cinema (2019: 85). In short, Livingston rejects any of the recent attempts to rebut his arguments or refine the definitions of the bold thesis or what would count as philosophy, despite most critics arguing that Livingston 'sets the bar too high' in articulating what the 'bold' version of the film as philosophy thesis would entail. Unsurprisingly, Livingston remarks that it is unlikely any film example would fulfil the stringent conditions required for the bold thesis, but acknowledges that many could satisfy a more moderate version of the film as philosophy thesis (2019: 88–89).
10. In *The Well-Wrought Urn*, Cleanth Brooks famously criticised the 'heresy of paraphrase', arguing that poetry should not be 'paraphrased' into its propositional content, for this would destroy the literary and aesthetic qualities of the work. For philosophers like Livingston, by contrast, paraphrase is the properly philosophical response to a work of art, whose

aesthetic qualities should be translated into the idiom of philosophical discourse in order to extract their philosophical content for the purposes of engaging in argument. Such approaches, however, ignore the question of whether something significant – like aesthetic meaning – is 'lost in translation', which is precisely what is at stake in the debate over the idea of film as philosophy: are there ways of thinking that cinema can express, but which philosophy fails to address or to communicate?

11. This is the real merit of Livingston's Bergman study (2009a): the philosophically original readings of Bergman's films, which make the case that Bergman is a cinematic philosopher more successfully than Livingston's attempt to anchor his films in Kaila's theories (important though this is for understanding Bergman's work).
12. It is implausible to describe 'analytic' philosophy as a monolithic paradigm, lacking diversity or plurality, even though the idea of analytic philosophy as a methodological approach to theory construction remains important (in aesthetics, for example). See, for example, Rajchman and West's volume, *Post-Analytic Philosophy* (1985), which articulated a movement (inspired by Rorty, Putnam and pragmatism) breaking with the overly linguistic and scientistic 'analytical' orthodoxy.
13. Cf. 'Here we need no external examination beyond the critical investigation of our own practices as they evolve historically' (Rodowick 2007b: 100).
14. Wittusen (2016) has argued that my own efforts at developing a 'romantic film-philosophy' incorporating philosophical film criticism, despite attending to the aesthetic dimension of cinema, risks falling into the 'philosophical disenfranchisement of film' that I have criticised in others, principally due to my attempt to 'translate' aesthetic meaning into philosophical discourse. He rightly notes that 'it is important to be aware that philosophical film criticism and traditional film criticism can have very different aims' (Wittusen 2016: 209), and that philosophical film criticism, in approaching cinematic works from the perspective of how they may contribute to philosophical understanding, remains bound to the idea of film experience being subordinated to philosophical comprehension. I agree that this remains a hermeneutic risk in any critical engagement with film, whether philosophical or not, but do not think that this means that an aesthetically responsive and self-reflexive form of philosophical film criticism necessarily distorts or dismisses what is aesthetically specific to cinema. We can regard and defend this approach, rather, as a philosophical response to the varieties of philosophically and ethically significant aesthetic experience that a film may make possible. My conception of philosophical film criticism as a 'translation' between the mediums of film and philosophy is an attempt to articulate the expression

of thought via moving images into a philosophically resonant, conceptually appropriate idiom. The idea of cinematic thinking, moreover, is an attempt to address Wittusen's concerns by proposing a more open, pluralistic and expansive way of thinking (than the more narrow 'film as philosophy debate') about how our aesthetic experience of film can have philosophical as well as ethical significance without being reducible to these particular aspects. Indeed, in challenging our conventional philosophical ways of thinking, cinematic experience, in its aesthetic dimensions, can be regarded as expressing a distinctively cinematic way of thinking.

15. My thanks to Tom Wartenberg for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

Chapter 9

1. A related strand concerns the Levinasian ethics of responsibility towards the 'alterity' of the Other as applied to our experience of cinema (see Cooper 2007; Girgus 2010; Raviv 2020).
2. Apart from references to other Latin American domestic 'maid dramas' (see below), it is also hard not to think of Rossellini's 1945 neorealist classic, *Rome, Open City* [*Roma città aperta*] (1945).
3. A fact that is marked in the use of italicised English subtitles in the film.
4. De la Mora notes that *Roma* received universal acclaim within Mexico, whereas the sharpest criticisms of the film came from (white) American critics (2019: 46), a point also noted by other scholars of transnational/global cinemas (see Marcantonio 2019). See Lagunas (2018) for an account of the 'almost unanimous praise for *Roma* in Mexico'.
5. See Ramirez's quotation (2019) of Cuáron responding to questions concerning the depiction of indigenous domestic workers in the film: https://twitter.com/MonicaRamirezOH/status/1094416001028911104 (accessed 1 April 2021).

Part III

1. See Mullarkey (2009: 4 ff., 2011) for versions of this line of criticism applied to advocates of the 'film as philosophy' thesis.
2. The fact that the philosophical 'canon' remains overwhelmingly masculinist and Anglo/Eurocentric is a case in point. Here one can only gesture to the possibility of expanding and pluralising the kinds of films, traditions and

auteurs who are at the forefront of philosophical filmmaking (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Bong Joon-ho, Catherine Breillat, Jane Campion, Claire Denis, Lav Diaz, Ashgar Farhadi, Alejandro González Iñárittu, Kelly Reichardt, Céline Sciamma, Warwick Thornton, Agnès Varda, Denis Villeneuve, Wong Kar-wai, Jia Zhangke, to name a few).

Chapter 10

1. Wartenberg (2007: 18) mentions Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001) as a possible candidate for film doing philosophy.
2. Goodenough discusses 'films about philosophy' (focusing on Rohmer's *Ma nuit chez Maud*), praising Dick and Kofman's *Derrida* as 'rather more than a mere documentary' because it 'both depicts Derrida's public activities as a philosopher, his speeches and meetings, yet at the same time deconstructs them' (2005: 6). Strathausen (2009) also comments on *Derrida* in relation to Derrida's account of teletechnologies (see Derrida and Stiegler 2002). As he remarks of the film's pointed inclusion of the filmmaking apparatus within various sequences, 'these multilevel scenes of mediation put into play the constitutive impossibility of getting to the source or the essence of the subject "Derrida"' (Strathausen 2009: 140). Trine Riel (2015) examines the manner in which philosophers in cameo are depicted on screen, focusing on Brice Parain in Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1963) and Jacques Derrida in Ken McMullen's *Ghost Dance* (1983).
3. One recent exception is Riel (2015).
4. See Bowie (2015) for a discussion of how cultural meaning-making practices – such as art – can be understood as philosophically significant performances that disclose and enhance our sense of meaning in the world. See also Cull Ó Maoilearca and Lagaay (2014) on Performance Philosophy.
5. The film was accompanied by a book (Dick and Kofman 2005) comprising the screenplay, transcript of a Q&A with the filmmakers and Derrida, and additional essays by Geoffrey Hartmann and Nicholas Royle, plus photographs from the film.
6. Riel (2015: 93 ff.) discusses four ways in which philosophers appear in fictional and non-fictional films, including 'a known philosopher playing himself', as in the 'Derrida' documentaries. Grindon (2007) discusses the poetics of the documentary interview format, an approach that has its roots in televisual culture.
7. An early anticipation of this style of screening philosophy can be found in one of the 12 chapters composing Godard's *Vivre sa vie* ('The Unwitting Philosopher'), which I discuss in the Preface to this book. See also Riel (2015).

8. Consider Amy Ziering Kofman's text in Dick and Kofman (2005): 'Making "Derrida" – An impression; or: How to make a film about someone who doesn't want a film made about them and whose work "to put it mildly" at first glance would appear to resist any and all cinematic treatment'. Kirby Dick (2005) further explains the challenges of making a 'deconstructive documentary' about Derrida, in a manner that reflects his manner of thinking, which also means deconstructing the cinematic presentation of Derrida as a biographical subject: 'there was an underlying demand that the film be made in the style of the subject's work. . . that our film (indeed any film) about Derrida *be* "Derridean". Or. . . "do Derrida to Derrida"' (Dick 2005: 44).
9. Thomassen notes the difficulties the film encounters in trying to maintain both an ironic distance from, and a pedagogical relationship towards, its biographical subject: 'The film keeps an ironic distance to Derrida, a self-irony that also characterises Derrida himself. And yet the film is also uncritical and, in this respect, it follows Derrida too closely (or, one might argue, by following Derrida too closely and uncritically it precisely does *not* follow him or deconstruction). At times the film falls into a kind of student/professor relationship *vis-à-vis* its subject, and this is my main objection to the film' (Thomassen 2006).
10. Some critics, however, do take this approach, crediting biographical experiences as shaping a philosopher's thinking in profound ways. It is hard to ignore the importance of Nietzsche's break with Wagner as shaping the direction of his thought, or the complexities of Heidegger's influence on Arendt's political philosophy, or even Foucault's experimentation with drugs and the gay subcultural scene in California as shaping his later thought. See, for example, Ettinger (1997) and Dean and Zamora (2021).
11. Think, for example, of texts such as Ray Monk's *Wittgenstein*, the trilogy of Foucault biographies by Didier Eribon, David Macey and David Miller, Rüdiger Safranski's *Heidegger: Ein Meister aus Deutschland* (a reference to Paul Celan's poem, 'Todesfuge' ['Death Fugue']), or Julian Young's monumental philosophical biography, *Nietzsche*.
12. This sequence, which begins with Pascale Ogier asking Derrida whether he believes in ghosts, can be viewed online: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nmu3uwqzbI (accessed 9 February 2021).
    Derrida has collaborated with Safaa Fathy on another film, *Nom à la mer* (Safaa Fathy 2004), which features Derrida reciting one of her poems. She also made an earlier one on Derrida, *De tout coeur* [*With All My Heart*, 1999], a montage of three of Derrida's last public appearances. See Cavitch (2021) for a detailed deconstructive commentary on *Nom à la mer*.
13. There is some debate about how the title of this film should be translated. As Marguerite La Caze notes (2019: 156), 'd'ailleurs' can also mean

'moreover', 'besides', 'in another way', 'otherwise' or 'in other respects', as well as 'elsewhere', suggesting that 'From Elsewhere, Derrida' is a more apt translation. David Wills, by contrast, suggests, 'Moreover Derrida' as the primary meaning of the title without explaining why that would be superior to 'Derrida's Elsewhere', which is surprising given the clear emphasis on the theme of 'elsewhere' from the beginning and throughout the film.

14. Fathy's film can be viewed on YouTube with English subtitles: www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMQDUrQ6ctM (accessed 9 February 2021).
15. For an illuminating discussion of the film, emphasising both its philosophical and cinematic dimensions, see Peggy Kamuf's excellent (2010) introduction to a 2005 memorial screening of *D'ailleurs, Derrida*. See also Olson's (2001) review.
16. La Caze argues that the film enables us to understand and question Derrida's thought, pointing out that Fathy questions Derrida's notion of hospitality in their co-authored work (2019: 154). Moreover, the film often offers a visual counterpoint to what Derrida is saying on screen (La Caze 2019: 157), using the displacement of place and refusal to situate shots of Derrida within identifiable locales or provide written context for these visual sequences in order to evoke 'Derrida's elsewhere' audiovisually (which, ironically, would seem to confirm rather than question what Derrida is saying in the film).
17. One could argue that *D'ailleurs, Derrida* (the film) needs to be understood in conjunction with *Tourner les mots* (the co-authored text by Fathy and Derrida on the making of *D'ailleurs, Derrida*), which is where the conflict between 'the Author' and 'the Actor' becomes much more explicit and thematic. Nonetheless, Derrida's impatience with the filmmaker and filmmaking process is evident in some scenes in *D'ailleur, Derrida* (such as in the fish in the fishbowl scene which he takes as an allegory of himself in relation to the film) but the film as a whole remains deferential towards Derrida's discourse and presence. Moreover, as Derrida also notes, in an interview, the book and the film are both connected and 'radically independent' (De Baecque 2015: 35).
18. Bruzzi criticises Nichols, however, for conflating performance with the deconstructive notion of performativity, referring to Judith Butler's work, claiming that this is what Nichols *should* have used to describe the 'performative' mode of documentary presentation (2000, 154).
19. Butler draws on Derrida's deconstructive critique (1988) of Searle's account of J. L. Austin's pragmatic theory of performative speech acts, arguing that the fluidity of context and necessity of iterability (citational repeatability) make Searle's attempts to formalise definable rules governing the performance of speech acts fundamentally untenable.

Chapter 11

1. Freeland (1999) has discussed the elements of the aesthetic experience of the sublime in cinema.
2. This section title echoes Derrida (1984).
3. 'Last man' narratives have proven popular in film; Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend* has inspired adaptations like *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Omega Man* (1971) and the more recent *I Am Legend* (2007).
4. At the end of H. G. Wells' *Time Machine* (1895), the expansion of the sun causes the death of all life on Earth.
5. The film is *The World, The Flesh, and the Devil* (Ranald MacDougall 1959).
6. Apocalyptic movies (e.g. *Before the Fall*, *4:44 Last Day on Earth* or *Melancholia*) are centred on characters' responses and actions to the catastrophic destruction of civilisation or even the Earth itself, whether due to nuclear war, biological catastrophe or planetary collision. Post-apocalyptic movies (e.g. *Hour of the Wolf*, *28 Days Later* or *The Road*), focus on the aftermath of the apocalyptic event, how survivors struggle to keep alive in a devastated and anarchic environment. Some films (*2012*, for example) attempt to straddle both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic scenarios.
7. Given the global pandemic sweeping the world at the time of writing this revised edition of my book, it is pertinent to mention the swathe of 'viral pandemic' apocalyptic films that have emerged in recent years. These include *28 Days Later* (Boyle 2002), *Contagion* (Soderberg 2011), *World War Z* (Foster 2013), *Pandemic* (Suits 2016) and *Train to Busan* (Yeon Sang-ho 2016).
8. Schelling (1978 [1789]: 225) writes: 'The work of art reflects to us the identity of the conscious and unconscious activities'.
9. Like many recent movies, the rest of *Melancholia* was shot on high definition digital video using an Arri Alexa camera.
10. The golf course at which the wedding reception is to be held has 18 holes (as we are reminded twice in the film).
11. As Manohla Darghis (2011) remarks, the image could be a reference to Isaiah 51:8: 'For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation'.
12. The arresting of movement via striking but static imagery coupled with the use of evocative, expressive music in von Trier's Prelude, as Grodal remarks (2012: 48), has the effect of both arresting and stimulating affective and emotional responsiveness: it 'presses the accelerator and touches the brake at the same time'.

13. See the essays in Hjort (2008) for discussions of von Trier's game-playing as an exemplary case of cinematic 'creativity under constraint'. Elsaesser (2015) also discussed *Melancholia* as a case of the philosophical-aesthetic 'mind-game' film.
14. Cf. 'the danger in *Melancholia* – from a strange and difficult to detect planet that may possibly destroy the Earth – fits perfectly into such a system of obsessive-compulsive anxiety. The anxiety is linked to severe panic by fundamental threats to bonding that will be clear in the rest of the film (as OCD may reflect an insecure bonding in the past or in the present)' (Grodal 2012: 51).
15. Compare the very different depiction of the 'end-of-the-world' in McKay's *Don't Look Up* (2021), which literally (and unironically) enacts the 'pleasant family dinner with a few glasses of wine' scenario that Justine so mocks and despises.
16. The slogan 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' is attributed to both Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek (see Fisher 2009). The argument as applied to film seems to be that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, ergo films depicting the end of the world are really allegories of the end of capitalism. A suggestive parallel, however, is different from a relationship of implication.
17. Žižek (2012b: 273 ff.) discusses the fantasy situation of being in a position to contemplate our own death or absence from the Earth.
18. My thanks to Magdalena Zolkos for her generous and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
19. Cf. von Trier's remark: 'If you ask me, she is longing for shipwrecks and sudden death, as Tom Kristensen wrote. And she gets it, too. In a way, she succeeds in pulling this planet from behind the sun and she surrenders to it'. *Melancholia* Pressbook, p. 5. For such a critique, see Richard Brody (2011); for a countering view, see Steve Williams (2011).

Chapter 12

1. Two recent forays into extending the 'film as philosophy' discussion to documentary (focusing on *The Act of Killing* [*Jagal*] (Oppenheimer and Anonymous, 2012) include Sinnerbrink (2016a: 165–184) and Wartenberg (2017). See also Abbott 2019 and Chaudhuri 2014
2. Consider Deleuze's prescient remark from the late 1980s: 'The electronic image, that is, the tele and video image, the numerical [i.e. digital – R. S.] image coming into being, either had to transform cinema or to replace it, to mark its death' (1989: 265).

3. As Carroll notes (2021), television serials typically come in three different forms: the *sequential narrative*, a continuous story with a large cast of characters unfolding over time with intersecting plot lines (*The Crown*, *Mad Men*); the *episodic narrative*, featuring a small cast of central characters who appear in different scenarios, often disconnected, each episode (*Jeeves and Wooster* or *Steptoe and Sons*); the *anthology series* comprising discrete standalone episodes with a different cast each episode (*Black Mirror*, *The Twilight Zone*).
4. In what follows, I will often refer simply to '*Black Mirror*' as a collective title covering the various episodes included in the five series comprising it.
5. Elsaesser (2019) positions his intervention in the contemporary 'film as philosophy' debate as both setting out to understand 'the symptomatic nature of the philosophical turn in film studies' (2019: 21), and to explore the idea of film as 'thought experiment' in a more ethico-politically oriented sense than Anglo-American philosophers of film (like Wartenberg). Indeed the European films on which Elsaesser focuses (by Clare Denis, Aki Kaurismäki, Fatih Akin, Lars von Trier and Christian Petzold) elaborate distinctive kinds of thought experiment that feature both cinematic self-reflective and ethico-political dimensions.
6. *Daily Mail Island* is a satirical documentary-style account of a fake reality TV show featuring middle-class progressives on a remote Welsh island. Their only source of news and information is the British tabloid the *Daily Mail*, and as a result they are soon comically transformed into conservative bigots.
7. See Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's recent remarks comparing the secret use of face-recognition technology to a real-life 'Black Mirror' situation: 'This is some real-life "Black Mirror" stuff that we're seeing here', she said. 'And I think it's really important that everyone really understand what's happening because. . . this is happening secretly, as well' (quoted in Houser 2020).
8. Di Summa (2019) makes the important point that *Black Mirror* does not simply 'mirror' contemporary fears concerning the consequences of technology or illustrate philosophical theories (whether from the Frankfurt School or post-structuralist thinkers) that are critical of the ideological uses of modern technology. Rather, she claims, the series reflects upon the manner in which individual users are transformed by their engagement with technology, and the manner in which the seductive aesthetic, cognitive problem-solving and pleasurable uses of technology are part of how it exercises its subjective and social effects. She argues that it thereby offers a genuine case of 'film as philosophy' and points to the forms of 'pragmatic disillusionment' that the series enacts; but she also argues that it shows, in a 'novel and aesthetically captivating' manner, the

ambiguous character of modern technology – a point that chimes with my 'Heideggerian' claim that *Black Mirror* explores both the 'dangers' and the 'saving power' of modern (communicational, social, AI and VR) technologies.

9. Jeff Minter (aka 'Yak'), who plays author Jerome F. Davies, is a real-life game designer and programmer who founded the company Llamasoft and designed several important games during the 1980s.
10. See Ungureanu (2015) for an interesting discussion of 'The National Anthem' focusing on the 'artist's violence' and act of self-sacrifice analysed from the perspective of Jean Baudrillard's remarks on 'spectacular terror' and Walter Benjamin's reflections on violence and technology.
11. See cf. Terri Murray's (2013) discussion, for example, for a Frankfurt School-style reading of 'Fifteen Million Merits', which overlooks this 'performative' aesthetic dimension of the episode. See di Summa (2019) for a critique of Murray's account. Nonetheless, it is difficult not to see the episode as a whole as a critique of the co-opting of social and political dissent into popular media entertainment.
12. This idea has recently been taken up in reality, as featured in a recent Korean television documentary on the recreation of a virtual reality avatar of a mother's deceased daughter. See Hayden (2020).
13. The title 'Men Against Fire' refers to combat historian S. L. A. Marshall's non-fictional book of the same name and to Dave Grossman's *On Killing*, both of which were important sources for Brooker in writing the screenplay for the episode.
14. See Livingston and Ponech (2016) for an excellent discussion of 'twist endings' focusing on the case of Robert Enrico's short film, *La rivière du hibou* (1961), which is based on the Ambrose Bierce short story, 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek'.
15. See Sola and Martinez-Lucen (2016) for an illuminating analysis of 'White Bear' focusing on the way in which it presents different aspects of the 'social imaginary' of crime and punishment in contemporary Western societies.
16. See Sinnerbrink (2014a) for an exploration of the relationship between Heidegger and cinema.

Conclusion

1. See, for example, Falzon 2013; Livingston 2019; McClelland 2011; Wittusen 2016.
2. See Bogue (2002) and Gardner (2012) for discussions of Deleuze on Beckett and television.
3. An idea that Davies (2019) has discussed recently.

Filmography

4:44 Last Day on Earth (2011), [Film] Dir. Abel Ferrara, USA, Switzerland, France: Fabula, Funny Balloons, Wild Bunch.
8 ½ (1963), [Film] Dir. Frederico Fellini, Italy and France: Cineriz, Fracinex.
28 Days Later (2002), [Film] Dir. Danny Boyle, UK: DNA Films, UK Film Council.
300 (2007), [Film] Dir. Zack Snyder: USA: Legendary Pictures, Virtual Studios, Atmosphere Entertainment.
2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), [Film] Dir. Stanley Kubrick, USA: Stanley Kubrick Productions.
2012 (2009), [Film] Dir. Roland Emmerich, USA: Columbia Pictures, Centropolis Entertainment.
Adam's Rib (1944), [Film] Dir. George Cukor, USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
Adaptation (2002), [Film] Dir. Spike Jonze/Charlie Kaufman, USA: Sony Pictures.
Alice in the Cities (1974), [Film] Dir. Wim Wenders, Germany: Axion Films.
Alien (1979), [Film] Dir. Ridley Scott, USA: Brandywine Productions.
Alien^3 (1992), [Film] Dir. David Fincher, USA: Brandywine Productions.
Alien Resurrection (1997), [Film] Dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, USA: Twentieth Century Fox, Brandywine Productions.
Aliens (1986), [Film] Dir. James Cameron, USA: Brandywine Productions.
All About Eve (1950), [Film], Dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, USA: 20th Century Fox.
All About My Mother [*Todo sobre mi madre*] (1999), Dir. Pedro Almodóvar, Spain: El Deseo, Renn Productions, France 2 Cinema.
Amélie (2001), [Film] Dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, France: UGC Productions, UGC-Fox Distribution.
American Beauty (1999), [Film] Dir. Sam Mendes, USA: DreamWorks Pictures.
Anatomy of Hell [*Anatomie de l'enfer*] (2004), [Film] Dir. Catherine Breillat, France: Canal+, CB Films, CNC.
Antichrist (2009), [Film] Dir. Lars von Trier, Denmark, France, Germany: Zentropa Entertainments, arte France Cinéma, Canal+, Danmarks Radio.
Au hasard Balthazar (1966), [Film] Dir. Robert Bresson, France: Cinema Ventures.
The Awful Truth (1937), [Film] Dir. Leo McCarey, USA: Columbia Pictures.
Badiou (2018), [Film] Dir. Gorav Kalyan and Rohan Kalyan, USA and France: Nonetheless Productions.

Badlands (1973), [Film] Dir. Terrence Malick, USA: Warner Brothers.
Band of Ninja (1967), [Film/Animation] Dir. Nagisa Oshima, Japan: ATG.
Bande à part (1964), [Film] Dir. Jean-Luc Godard, France: Anouchka Films, Orsay Films.
Beau travail (1999), [Film] Dir. Claire Denis, France: Pyramide Distribution.
Before the Fall (2008), [Film] Dir. F. Javier Gutierrez, Spain: Canal Sur Television, Green Moon Productions, Maestranza Films.
Being-in-the-World (2010), [Film] Dir. Tao Ruspoli, USA: Mangusta Productions.
Bicycle Thieves [*Ladri de biciclette*] (1948), [Film] Dir. Vittorio de Sica, Italy: Produzioni De Sica.
The Big Sleep (1946), [Film] Dir. Howard Hawks, USA: Warner Bros.
Black Mirror (2011–2019), [TV programme], Creator Charlie Brooker, Channel 4 and Netflix, UK and USA: Zeppotron, House of Tomorrow.
Blade Runner (1982), [Film] Dir. Ridley Scott, USA: The Ladd Company, Slade Brothers, Blade Runner Partnership.
Blue (1993), [Film] Dir. Derek Jarman, UK: Basilisk Communications Ltd.
Body Double (1984), [Film] Dir. Brian de Palma, USA: Delphi II Productions.
Breaking Bad (2008–2013), [TV programme] Creator Vince Gilligan, USA: High Bridge Entertainment, Gran Via Productions, Sony Pictures Television.
Breaking the Waves (1996), [Film] Dir. Lars von Trier, Denmark, Sweden, France, Netherlands: ARTE, Argus Films Produktie, Canal+.
Breathless [*À bout de souffle*] (1960), [Film] Dir. Jean-Luc Godard, France: SNC.
Bringing Up Baby (1938), [Film] Dir. Howard Hawks, USA: RKO Radio Pictures.
Caché [*Hidden*] (2006), [Film] Dir. Michael Haneke, France, Austria, Germany, Italy: Les Films du Losange, Wega Films, Bavaria Films.
The Canterbury Tales [*I raconti di Canterbury*] (1972), [Film] Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy: Les Productions Artistes.
Carne y arena [*Flesh and Sand*] (2017), [VR Installation], Dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, USA: Legendary Pictures.
Carol (2015), [Film], Dir. Todd Haynes, USA: The Weinstein Company, Film 4, Number 9 Films.
Carrie (1976), [Film], Dir. Brian de Palma, USA: Metro Goldwyn Mayer, United Artists, Redbank Films.
Casablanca (1942), [Film] Dir. Michael Curtiz, USA: Warner Bros. Pictures.
Citizen Kane (1941), [Film], Dir. Orson Welles, USA: Mercury Productions.
City Lights (1931), [Film] Dir. Charlie Chaplin, USA: United Artists.
Contagion (2011), [Film] Dir. Stephen Soderbergh, USA: Participant Media, Imagenation Abu Dhabi, Double Feature Films.
D'ailleur, Derrida [*Derrida's Elsewhere*] (1999), [Film], Dir. Safaa Fathy, France: Gloria Films.

Days of Heaven (1978), [Film] Dir. Terrence Malick, USA: Paramount Pictures.
Derrida (2002), [Film], Dir. Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, USA: Jane Doe Films.
The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (2007), [Film] Dir. Julian Schnabel, France, USA: Canal+, Kennedy/Marshall Company, France 3 Cinéma.
Dogville (2003), [Film] Dir. Lars von Trier, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Germany: Zentropa Entertainments, Isabella Films B. V., Something Else B. V.
Double Indemnity (1944), [Film] Dir. Billy Wilder, USA: Paramount Pictures.
Dr Strangelove (1964), [Film] Dir. Stanley Kubrick, USA: Columbia Pictures.
Duck Soup (1933), [Film] Dir. Leo McCarey, USA: Paramount Pictures.
Easy Rider (1969), [Film] Dir. Dennis Hopper, USA: Pando Company INC, Raybert Productions.
Empire (1964), [Film] Dir. Andy Warhol, USA: Warhol Films.
Enter the Void (2009), [Film] Dir. Gaspar Noé, France, Germany, Italy: Fidélité Films, Wild Bunch, Les Cinémas de la Zone.
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004) [Film] Dir. Michel Gondry, USA: Anonymous Content/This Is That.
Europa '51 (1952), [Film] Dir. Roberto Rossellini, Italy: I.F.E. Releasing Corporation.
Examined Life (2008), [Film] Dir. Astra Taylor, Canada: Sphinx Productions.
Fight Club (1999), [Film] Dir. David Fincher, USA: 20th Century Fox.
Finding Nemo (2003), [Animation] Dir. Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich, USA: Pixar Walt Disney Films/Animation Studios.
Fitzcarraldo (1982), [Film] Dir. Werner Herzog, Werner Herzog Filmproduktion, Filmverlag der Autoren.
The Five Obstructions (2003), [Film] Dir. Lars von Trier and Jorgen Leth, Denmark: Zentropa Real ApS, Wajnbrosse Productions, Koch-Lorber Films.
The Flicker (1965), [Film] Dir. Tony Conrad, USA: Tony Conrad.
The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara (2003), [Film] Dir. Errol Morris, USA: Sony Pictures Classics.
Freud: The Secret Passion (1962), [Film] Dir. John Huston, USA: Universal-International.
Funny Games (1997), [Film] Dir. Michael Haneke, Austria: Österreicher Rundfunk.
Funny Games (2007), [Film] Dir. Michael Haneke, USA, France, UK, Germany, Italy: Celluloid Dreams, Tartan Films, Film4 Productions, Halcyon Company.
Gaslight (1944), [Film] Dir. George Cukor, USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
Germany Year Zero (1948), [Film] Dir. Roberto Rossellini, Italy: Produzione Salvo D'Angelo and Tevere Film.

Ghost Dance (1983), [Film] Dir. Ken McMullen, West Germany, UK: Channel Four Films, Channel Four Television, Looseyard Films.

The Great Dictator (1940), [Film] Dir. Charlie Chaplin, USA: United Artists.

Hannah Arendt (2012), [Film] Dir. Margarethe von Trotta, Germany, Luxembourg, France, Israel: Heimatfilm, Amour Fou Luxembourg, MACT Productions.

Happy Together/Buenos Aires Affair (1997), [Film] Dir. Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong: Kino International.

House of Cards (2013–2018), [TV programme] Creator Beau Willimon, USA: Netflix.

The Hurt Locker (2008), [Film] Dir. Kathryn Bigelow, USA: Voltage Pictures, Voltage Park Media, Film Capital Europe Funds.

In the Mood for Love (2000), [Film] Dir. Wong-Kar-wai, Hong Kong/China: Jet Tone Productions, Paradis Films.

Inception (2010), [Film], Dir, Christopher Nolan, USA/UK: Legendary Pictures, Syncopy.

Independence Day (1996), [Film] Dir. Roland Emmerich, USA: Centropolis Entertainment.

Inland Empire (2006), [Film] Dir. David Lynch, France, Poland, USA: Absurda, Studio Canal.

Irréversible (2002), [Film] Dir. Gaspar Noé, France: Le Cinémas de la Zone, StudioCanal.

Is the Man Who Is Tall Happy? (2014), [Film] Dir. Michael Gondry, France: Partizan Films.

The Ister (2004), [Film] Dir. David Barison and Daniel Ross, Australia: Black Box Sound and Image.

It Happened One Night (1934), [Film] Dir. Frank Capra, USA: Columbia Pictures.

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels (1975), [Film], Dir. Chantal Akerman, Belgium/France: Paradise Films.

Journey to Italy [*Viaggio in Italia*] (1954), [Film] Dir. Roberto Rossellini, Italy: Titanus Distribuzione.

Kiss Me Deadly (1955), [Film] Dir. Robert Aldrich, USA: Parklane Pictures.

La guerre est finie (1966), [Film] Dir. Alain Resnais, France: Europa Film, Sofracima.

La jetée (1962), [Film] Dir. Chris Marker, France: Argos Films.

The Lady Eve (1941) Dir. Preston Sturges, USA: Paul Jones, Buddy G DeSylva/ Paramount Pictures.

The Lady in the Lake (1946), [Film] Dir. Robert Montgomery, USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

The Last Man on Earth (1964), [Film] Dir. Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow, USA, Italy: Associated Producers Inc. Produzioni La Regina.

Last Night (1998), [Film] Dir. Don McKellar, Canada: Alliance Atlantis, Odeon Films.
The Last Sunset (1961), [Film] Dir. Robert Aldrich, USA: Brynapod.
Last Year at Marienbad (1966), [Film] Dir. Alain Resnais, France, Italy: Cocinor.
Le Quattro Volte (2010), [Film] Dir. Michelangelo Frammartino, Italy, Germany, Switzerland: Invisible Film, Ventura Film, Vivo Film.
Letter from an Unknown Woman (1948), [Film] Dir. Max Ophüls, USA: Rampart Productions.
Letter to Jane (1972), [Film] Dir. Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, France.
Love Actually (2003), [Film], Dir. Richard Curtis, UK: StudioCanal, Working Title Films, DNA Films.
Magnolia (1999), [Film] Dir. P. T. Anderson, USA: Ghoulardi Film Company, JoAnne Sellar Productions.
The Maltese Falcon (1941), [Film] Dir. John Huston, USA: Warner Bros.
Meek's Cutoff (2010), [Film] Dir. Kelly Reichardt, USA: Evenstar Films, Oscilloscope Laboratories.
Melancholia (2011), [Film] Dir. Lars von Trier, Denmark, Sweden, France, Germany: Zentropa Entertainments, Memfis Films, Slot Machine, Liberator Productions.
Memento (2000), [Film] Dir. Christopher Nolan, USA: Summit Entertainment Team Tod.
Memoria (2021), [Film] Dir. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Columbia, Thailand, Germany, France, Mexico: 165 Films, Anna Sanders Films, Beijing Contemporary Art Foundation.
Minority Report (2002), [Film] Dir. Steven Spielberg, USA: Twentieth-Century Fox, DreamWorks Pictures, Amblin Entertainment.
Miracle Mile (1988), [Film] Dir. Steve de Jarnatt, USA: Miracle Mile Productions.
Mirror [*Zerkalo*] (1979), [Film] Dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, Russia: Mosfilm.
Mission: Impossible (1996), [Film] Dir. Brian de Palma, USA: Cruise/Wagner Productions.
Modern Times (1936), [Film] Dir. Charlie Chaplin, USA: United Artists.
Mouchette (1967), [Film] Dir. Robert Bresson, France: Anatole Dauman.
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